

chases, escapes, true love, miracles

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by [pepperfield](#)

Summary

Just because the timeline has been restored, doesn't mean things are back to normal. Cisco's got 99 problems, and Harry Wells is approximately 38 of them.

In which Cisco makes a bunch of plans, fails most of them, narrowly avoids being disintegrated, receives a hug or two, finds his groove, and gets his man. More or less in that order.

Notes

Look, I have no excuse for this. Don't be fooled by the length: this is not a plotty fic. This is a completely untenable rambling mess of disgusting fluff for my Problem Ship™.

Some notes:

- This goes AU as of the s3 trailer; it assumes the existence of some version of flashpoint, without any really explicit mention to it.
- I did not anticipate that flashpoint would turn Cisco into a billionaire?? I'm very glad canon is treating him better than I thought they would, but this fic was written under the assumption that the events of 2x11 would be a vaguely accurate representation of what might happen to him whenever the timeline changes drastically.
- Includes much medical, scientific, and assorted handwaving. Also, please assume all the metas in the Pipeline have been moved to Iron Heights.

Please let me know if you have any questions/concerns! Thank you for reading!!

Later on, Cisco will realize all the weirdness begins here, in this moment, during the hug. He would venture to say that the hug itself might actually be ground zero, but as it's happening, there's no room for anything in his brain except the fact that Harry (!) is hugging (!!) him. It's a very emotional moment for Cisco, which he only partially ruins by saying "Awww, I knew you'd succumb eventually. I'm very huggable." He finishes ruining it by coughing blood into his hand over Harry's shoulder, causing Caitlin to run over and haul Harry away so she can check on Cisco's vitals again. "You're sticking around a little longer, right? I wanted to talk to you about making a ring for Barry's suit," he calls, but Caitlin's already shooing Harry from the room. There's a lot of scolding that follows, since she'd warned Cisco not to open a breach so soon after they altered the timeline, but he just shrugs and allows her to fuss. It was totally worth it, even with the incoming headache.

He has less of an excuse when he still doesn't notice Harry acting odd over the next few weeks, but in his defense, the whole team is still trying to find their footing post-Zoom, even if the timeline has been restored. Barry's still grieving his father, and trying to overcome the guilt of almost killing Cisco via time shenanigans and generally wonking up their alt-lives. The alternate timeline (heretofore referred to B1 after Barry) was kind of a mindfuck for Cisco in more ways than one, but thankfully those memories aren't constantly assaulting his brain. They usually manifest in funky dreams, so Cisco can ignore them for the most part. No one else from Earth-1 remembers that timeline, of course, but the event still leaves its mark on STAR Labs, making everyone a little awkward around each other, and amidst all that, Harry's strange behavior just seems like a part of the whole mess.

After a few months though, once things have settled and Barry's finally accepted that Cisco's mostly forgiven him for all the brain hemorrhages and stuff, and Caitlin's smiling more again, and Iris and Joe get to mercilessly tease Wally whenever he and Jesse sort of flirt with each other – after things are back to normal, that's when Cisco finally notices that something's off.

The Wells family had returned to Earth-1 to check on the team after helping alt-Barry and alt-Cisco set things right, and had kind of just never gotten around to leaving for good again. Their little room looks as lived in as it ever did, and Harry's gone back to co-opting everything in STAR Labs as if he'd never left. It actually almost slips Cisco's mind sometimes, but for the new development since the Wells' return.

They're little, innocuous differences at first. Harry doesn't seem to purposely use his height to loom over Cisco anymore when they're standing beside each other, and restrains himself from talking over Cisco when they're discussing something with the team. He makes a perfunctory attempt to knock on the doorframe before barging into Cisco's workshop. Cisco just assumes that he learned some manners in the five days he spent back on Earth-2, but then he'll say something tactlessly abrasive again, and destroy the illusion of improvement. And then five minutes later, he'll pat Cisco on the shoulder as he walks past, even though Cisco hasn't done anything to deserve anyone's praise in the last half hour. Overall, though, he's been marginally...nicer. Cisco would probably appreciate these changes if they didn't instill in him the hunch that the only reason Harry is changing is because he needs to adjust for something Cisco's doing wrong. But he *knows* he's doing everything perfectly right, so he only winds up confused.

It all coalesces into a general sense of strangeness that Cisco lets stew in the back of his mind, but he ignores it for a while longer since it's not really affecting how they work with each other. They still bicker and collaborate and fall into sync as fluidly as they did before. Nothing major grabs his attention until the day Harry pauses in the middle of typing in order to walk over to the whiteboard and hand Cisco a marker. He accepts the utensil, then spends the next twenty seconds staring dully down at his own hands, wondering why that seemed so strange.

"Did you just get up to give me a whiteboard marker?" he asks Harry, who's returned to the computer and resumed typing.

The look he receives in response is less scathing than he expected, which is also kind of weird. "Yes. That's why you're holding a marker now," Harry tells him tersely.

"Okay, sure. But...why?" Cisco wiggles the marker a little bit before uncapping it, but it seems completely ordinary. Not booby-trapped. He draws a tentative line on the board, turning it into a happy face when nothing explodes.

Ah, and here comes the face Cisco knows and loves. Harry's eyebrows draw together and his mouth flattens out as he glares at Cisco like he literally cannot believe he has to have this conversation right now. "I thought – erroneously, *apparently* – that your whining about not having a marker was your annoying way of asking me for one of mine. If that's not the case, I'll gladly take it back." He gets up and starts stalking back over, so Cisco throws his hands up to shield himself and protect his marker.

"No, you were totally right about the whining. I meant like, why didn't you just throw it to me like usual? Did you hurt your arm?" he asks, reaching out to tug at Harry's sleeve to get a look. Leave it to Harry to injure himself and forget to tell Caitlin. Always on the move, always forgetting to take care himself in between his plans and his concern over Jesse's well-being.

Now Harry's the one left staring dumbly at Cisco's hands as they try and pry his sleeve up. It only lasts a moment; he brushes Cisco's fingers away soon after and takes a step back, looking him over. Being scrutinized like that makes Cisco feel unnaturally jittery, like he'll be found lacking in some way or another. Physically, mentally, spiritually, something: whatever it is, he doesn't want to fall short of Harry's standards, but he supposed there's not much he can do about it. He's already long gotten used to disappointing people around him no matter how brightly he shines.

"My arm is fine. No issues there," Harry finally says after they've been staring at each other for a bit too long.

"Oh." Cisco frowns at the gap between them, twirling the marker as he waits for an explanation that doesn't come. "So you're just not about throwing stuff anymore? That's cool, I guess, since you don't have cash up the wazoo here on Earth-1 to replace all the shit you break. I'll kinda miss it, though."

Another scrunchy Harry face follows. "You'll miss it? You hate it when I throw things at you."

“Did I say that?” Cisco wonders out loud. It's possible; the two of them are constantly bickering about mundane stuff, but Cisco thinks he would have remembered if he'd changed his mind on this.

“On multiple occasions. Loudly, and with very crisp elocution.” He looks like he's mentally reviewing each instance, his mouth slightly downturned and eyes flickering over Cisco's face. It sets off a memory in Cisco's own mind, and he thumps his fist against his palm when he recalls the context.

“Oh, wait, I remember now. No, I just don't like it when you throw fricking *grenades* at me, which, by the way, I cannot believe is a situation that's happened *three times* to date. F in gym, remember? One day my spectacular sportsball skills will fail us, and we will both die a terrible death, and you will have no one but yourself to blame.” He jabs Harry in the arm with his marker on the last few words.

“True. You really aren't the athletic type. And I've seen you lose an entire pizza to the pavement before,” Harry agrees after batting his hand away.

It proves his point, but Cisco still feels the need to defend himself against that particular party foul. “It was anchovy and mushroom. Very slippery.”

“Oh, right.” Harry nods once, gravely. “So yesterday, that monitor you were holding. That was anchovy and mushroom too?”

Cisco flicks him in the hand to punish him for his unwarranted sass. “That one was Barry's fault; I saw you jump too when he zoomed in. The hard drive last month though, that's on me. Straight up bungled that one, and chances are high I'll bungle the next grenade too, so stop trying to get us blown up. The other stuff though, the markers and erasers and junk, that's fine. Saves time, and it's kinda our thing, y'know?” Harry's mouth twitches slightly at that, and Cisco isn't sure if it's a good twitch or a bad twitch, so he continues babbling. “I mean, I know you chuck stuff at Barry too, but you're normally aiming for his forehead. Incidentally, Caitlin and Iris want me to file a request with you about that. They're afraid you'll give him brain damage.”

“They should be more worried about him giving *you* brain damage,” Harry mutters, stealing the marker out of Cisco's hand and modifying one of his equations. Cisco hums, watching him work. He hadn't considered doing what Harry's currently writing on the board, but maybe he'll allow it, since it's kind of sweet that Harry's still worrying about his health.

“Nah, Barry and I are past all that now. No more irresponsible time travel, no more vibing out of existence. It's cute that you were worried, though.” Cisco elbows Harry out of the way to look at his board again, and makes grabby hand motions for the marker, which the other man refuses to give up. “Under all your scowly scientist layers and atrocious personality you're just a big softie. I'm onto you.” Extending up on his tiptoes, he tries again to reach the marker, which Harry's now writing with up in the very top corner of the whiteboard just to spite him.

“I'll consider it a small miracle that I'm already considered a dead murderer in this world so you can't ruin my reputation any further,” Harry says, finally giving the marker back. “Don't

lose this,” he commands.

“You say that as if you won't be lobbing it off into some dusty corner the next time you get frustrated.”

“I won't. I'll be lobbing it at you.”

“Thanks,” Cisco says, somewhere between sarcasm and sincerity. He really does mean it, when he says that he'd miss something as simple as tossing pens between the two of them. It took a while before he and Harry could even stand one another, but now they speak a shared language, of electricity and gravity and mechanics, supplemented with hand motions and occasional bursts of telepathy. It would break their flow if they needed to walk across the room to each other every time one of them wanted something.

Harry regards him for a moment, blue eyes slightly narrowed, and Cisco knows he's being dissected, but for what reason, he can't tell. It occurs to him that they're standing really close to each other again, even though Harry isn't doing his hovering thing. For a moment, Cisco feels the gently strumming chill of anticipation, though he can't say what exactly he's expecting. He just knows it won't be what he hopes will happen.

But Harry turns around and begins walking back to the desk, saying nothing besides, “Check your math.”

“Um, my math, much like my hair, is perfect. Check *your face*- okay, that was a terrible comeback, give me a re-do.”

Harry shakes his head just a bit, exasperated but not particularly irritated as Cisco bombards him with hit-or-miss one liners, and things feel almost normal again, especially when his best references get parried back with ease, excepting a few odd Earth-2 lines from films he's never heard of. So Harry's acting a little dodgy, but it's nothing Cisco can't work with.

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They still argue, of course, but most of the time it's their usual mode of scientific advancement through squabbling.

Sometimes, though, it goes deeper than that. Sometimes, Harry tramples all over any evidence that their relationship has improved at all since they've first met, treating Cisco like again he's some kind of hack who hasn't demonstrated his abilities a hundred times over, and maybe he could put up with it before, when Jesse was held prisoner and they were all under considerable stress, but now, definitely not. He likes Harry well enough, more than he should, probably, but he isn't going to sit still and allow himself to be belittled just because Harry feels like he's contractually obligated to be an asshole for several hours each day.

Cisco is sick of people acting like he's less than them somehow, despite consistently proving otherwise. As if he isn't completely qualified to work at STAR Labs and the CCPD, as if his experience and expertise don't count, just because they belong to him. He's endured over twenty years' worth of people talking down to him, and he knows Harry treats everyone like

this occasionally, but that doesn't mean he has to put up with it. Especially when something as important as Barry's safety is at stake.

So when they enter the third round of arguing over the latest enhancements to Barry's suit, Cisco tries to stay calm, even as his blood starts to boil.

"He'll be fine; the worst he'll get is some bruised ribs and that's only if he launches himself right into the enemy's fist like an idiot." Harry stalks over to the suit and grabs his pliers, beginning to fiddle around as if they've settled on their decision already.

Cisco has to go and sidle in between him and the suit in order to snatch the pliers away. Some unreadable emotion flashes across Harry's face, and Cisco can see Barry, sitting off quietly to the left, reacting to it with a wince. Cisco presses on anyway. "Don't be disingenuous. That's the worst thing that would happen if everything else goes well. If St. Helen really can activate an explosion, then Barry's totally fried before he even has a chance to deploy it."

"Allen can handle a burn or two. You're all too protective of him."

"Just because he has accelerated healing abilities doesn't mean we can take stupid risks just for a chance to--"

"It's not *just* a chance. After he shoots the auxiliary net, he can get close enough to get a tissue sample with the needle in the time before the net falls. You're being irrational if you think that's not worth trying," Harry argues, but Cisco apparently has less patience than he remembers because he is done with this conversation.

"No." He says it firmly, holding out one hand and pressing hard against Harry's chest to halt him. Inside he's alight with anger, but his voice is iced over with disgust. "*Stop* that. You don't get to dismiss my concerns when you know I'm right. It's too dangerous to get so close to her. I'm not risking Barry's safety to get something we don't even need." Harry opens his mouth and Cisco presses down harder, snapping at him, "Don't try to deny it, Harry, so help me God, because I *know* that you know I'm right, and I'm not going to back down. We already know how to contain this meta without a tissue sample; I'm not letting you and your fucking hubris get my best friend killed just so you can prove something that doesn't need proving. We are not doing this."

He can feel the pressure of everything vibrating around him as Harry stares him down impassively, but he can't tell the difference between any of the waves. Inside, the ice and heat in him have reacted poorly to one another and he starts to feel queasy from confrontation, but he absolutely refuses to have his opinions walked all over again. From the corner of his eye, he can see Barry start to get up, to come over and diffuse the situation, but Harry speaks before he can stand.

"Fine. You're right; we know enough to capture her. We'll put the needle away for another time." Harry doesn't look defeated or contrite, but he does step back, looking at Cisco like he's considering something. Cisco can't help but be curious, but he's taking this victory and running with it.

“Thank you,” he says curtly, before Harry can change his mind. Turning to Barry, who's glancing between the two of them like they're the ones who might detonate at any moment, he says, *“So when you see her, take her down with the net as quick as you can. Your suit can withstand her natural temperature from a distance, but you shouldn't give her a chance to spot you, or get within arm's reach.”*

“Okay, sounds good to me,” Barry says gamely, clapping his hands on his thighs and finally standing up. *“Thanks for the upgrades, guys.”*

The three of them part awkwardly after that, not regrouping until Caitlin and Iris report back that they've spotted their latest criminal leaving her apartment. From there they fall back into the well-known rhythm of their mission, aiding Barry where needed. As Cisco suspected, their meta can combust at will, but Barry gets her caught in his net without getting too close. It takes a while for the CCPD to get everything sorted out, but with their special net neutralizing her, no one gets injured.

After their work is done for the day, Cisco retreats to his workshop to decompress for an hour or two before heading home to his apartment. There's no knock on the doorway this time when Harry enters, but the rattle of a chair being shifted out of the way and the ensuing footsteps are deliberately clear. He continues working for thirty seconds longer, ignoring Harry's presence long enough to make it obvious before he looks up warily.

“Is this about the self-repairing fabric prototype? Because I don't have all the materials yet,” he says, picking up their last civil conversation where they'd left off.

But Harry doesn't take his bait. He sits on the stool across from Cisco, and says clearly and quietly, *“I'm sorry about earlier. For disrespecting your opinion.”*

There's a brief period of three or so seconds where Cisco can feel his face shuffling through five different expressions as Harry watches him. *“Did you just apologize? To me?”* he manages eventually when his mouth feels like moving again.

He might have expected some level of obstinance, but Harry answers him plainly. *“Yes. You were right about the situation, and I was out of line to keep pushing despite knowing that.”* No frills about the apology, but he's telling the truth.

Cisco gapes for a second longer, then swallows down the snarky, deflective comment that he instinctively wants to throw out there. Instead, he absently tucks back a lock of hair that was obscuring his view, then looks Harry in the eye to finish having a conversation long overdue. *“Thanks. For admitting that.”* He sighs shortly before digging in for the right words to express what he should have eons ago. *“Look, you know I'm good at my job. I need you to take me seriously, especially when I know you're smart enough to realize when I'm right; stop dismissing what I have to say just to be a spiteful bastard.”*

“I don't need you to become all sunshine and rainbows, I just need you to stop and think once in awhile, ‘hmmm, maybe I shouldn't be a douche about this because sometimes other people know what they're talking about!’ And even when you're not sure if I'm right or not, even when it's not objectively clear, take a chance and trust me, okay? I'm pretty fucking smart.” He finishes speaking when he runs out of words, slightly out of breath and hoping that his

point has been made clear; when Harry nods back briskly, he snaps his mouth shut, awaiting his response.

“It might not always be evident from the way I act, but I *am* aware of that fact. You're nothing short of a genius,” Harry replies. His mouth, turned up in amusement, falls flat as he taps his fingertips thoughtlessly across the tabletop. “I can't promise I won't do it again – you know my personality is...difficult, to say the least, but I can try. Your opinion does matter to me, even when I'm being-”

“An asshole?”

“Argumentative, but your point stands too. What I'm saying is that I'll work on it, but I'm not always going to get it right.” It feels like an olive branch, so Cisco takes it, a hint of smile tugging at his lips.

“Okay, I can work with that. Your job is to learn to listen to others instead of being a jerkass just because you're the smartest person the room, and my job is to shut down your bullshit if you forget. A compromise, kind of.”

“I hate compromises.”

“You hate a lot of shit, I'm sure, but not us...?” Cisco trails off, waiting.

“Not you,” Harry confirms.

“But you don't hate us, so you're going to learn to act like it. Deal?” He extends his hand for a handshake, which Harry accepts after a second of consideration. His skin is slightly dry, the healing ridge of a scar from last month bisecting his palm, but they shake firmly, up and down twice as if it's a real transaction, and Cisco withdraws his hand from Harry's grip afterwards, pleased with how this didn't blow up in his face.

“You should never leave before getting it down in writing,” Harry says, as Cisco turns back to his work. He sounds almost like he's teasing, so Cisco looks back up at him to find him still sitting on the stool, resting his elbows on the table.

“Well, I know where you live, so if I need to shake you down for breach of contract, I *will* find you,” Cisco responds, mock-intimidating. He points his wire clippers at the other man, snapping them open and closed menacingly.

“Good thing I sleep with my pulse rifle under my cot.”

“Excuse me, is that a threat? Your Honor, this man has threatened to shoot me. Again! Where's the bailiff? Can we hold him in contempt of court?”

“You're exaggerating; I've never actually shot you, nor attempted to shoot you before. There was some gun-waving in your general direction-”

“-paired with that thousand-yard glare-”

“-with no intention to shoot. I was just on edge.”

“You're always on edge. You should get a hobby. It would do wonders for your stress.”

“Who has time for hobbies?” Harry scoffs. “I'm far too busy for that.”

“You don't look very busy,” Cisco says dryly. “Make yourself useful and get me the copper wire. No, the other shelf- c'mon, I know you know where it is!” He throws his arms up in indignation as Harry shuffles over to another incorrect shelf, looking blasé and disinclined to be of any help. “I don't know why I keep you around, honestly.”

“Because I'm tall,” Harry says, finally grabbing the spool of wire and sending it in Cisco's direction with an underhand throw.

“You do have that going for you- wait, no, I'm not ready,” he dissolves into spluttering as Harry tosses another spool, followed by an oily rag and several loose sticks of gum. The obvious response is to retaliate, and any hope of actually getting work done flies out the window when he hurls a leftover styrofoam block across the room. Even all the familiar old routines are starting to change, he thinks, as Harry dodges cleanly and the block knocks down a stack of cans. Maybe that's not such a bad thing.

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“-which is why we'll have Ram- *Cisco* activate the tracker after you and Detective West corner him. We need him to lead us back to the hive,” Harry explains to Barry, circling the point on the map that they should be aiming for.

Barry nods and pulls his mask down over his eyes. “Got it. We just have to get it on his back, right?” He holds up the tracker to examine its pincers more closely.

“Yeah, but you gotta wait until he completely changes, because he'll definitely notice if you try and stick the tracker to his skin,” Cisco warns him.

“Exactly, what Ra- *Cisco* just said,” Harry confirms as he takes the tracker back from Barry to load it into the firing device.

Joe, from his spot leaning in the doorway, turns to give Cisco a Look, after Harry messes up his name for the 4th time that day. Cisco shrugs back helplessly as Joe's eyebrow rises, as if he ever has any idea why Harry acts the way he does. When Cisco shakes his head again, still equally baffled, Joe's expression turns from bemusement to something a touch more thoughtful, and remains that way, even as he and Barry head out the door.

Cisco tries to let it go, because if Harry wants to finally learn his name, he's not gonna stop him, but then he starts overthinking it. Does it mean something? Is it a hint? A sign that Harry's sick of his own nickname? The team did kind of force it on him – maybe he's trying to initiate a deal.

He needs more data points. Caitlin would be the perfect subject, if only Cisco could observe the way Harry interacts with her, see if he's still calling her Snow, but she's not in the room right now, having left the lab with Iris to try and get some information from a local hospital about the recent attacks.

So as they're waiting for a sign from Joe and Barry on the meta situation, Cisco decides that he'll try reciprocating this name thing the next time he gets a chance. Sure enough, Harry waves him back over to the computer with a "Cisco, they're in position now; is the system online?"

Cisco scoots his chair into place next to him, and checks the screen. "Yeah, we're good here," he responds, before telling Barry that they're ready and just waiting on his signal. A few tense minutes later, after the sounds of a short scuffle, Barry gives them the okay, and they switch the transmitter in the tracker on.

"Alright, I think we're all set! He ran off right afterwards, so Joe and I are headed to the lab now," Barry tells them, and they sit back in relief. All they can do now is wait until the hive is located.

"Cool, see you back soon. I hope you didn't mess up our suit too much," Cisco says, but Barry only laughs in answer. "I bet he's covered in slime," he sighs at Harry, who huffs in amusement.

"You're already mentally drawing up plans to slime-proof the suit, aren't you?"

"Well, now that I know slime is a possible hazard, we have to be prepared, right?"

Right on cue, Barry arrives back at the lab, shiny with a thin layer of glop. He waves at them from the doorway, then gestures down the hall. "I dropped Joe off back at home. I gotta hit the shower first – I'll check in with you guys after."

"Sure, but bring me the suit when you're done!" Barry salutes and takes off, leaving a trail of ooze behind. Cisco groans. "Not looking forward to this cleanup. Which reminds me, Harry-uh. Harryson. *Harrison*. Right. I know you had-

"Wait, stop," Harry demands, using his hand to make a 'close your mouth' gesture. "What was that?"

"What was what?" Cisco tries to play innocent, but Harry isn't buying into it at all. "Oh, the name thing? Was it weird? I can do 'Dr. Wells' instead, if you really want." He can't help but make a face though, despite his offer. It's not like he conflates Harry with the Reverse-Flash any more, and it wouldn't hurt, not like it used to, to be reminded of Dr. Wells, to be reminded of what that man took from him and Caitlin, from Barry and Iris, but there's a level of discomfort that he can't overcome.

"No," Harry says immediately, looking sort of haunted. "Definitely no Dr. Wells. What happened to 'Harry'?"

"I dunno, I thought maybe you were sick of it?"

Harry stares back, his expression as confused as Cisco feels. "I think by now you should have realized that I can't *actually* read your mind and follow your ridiculous jumps in logic."

Despite his efforts not to, Cisco pouts, only a little bit, because he thought this telepathy thing between them was a two-way street. "Really? 'Cause you're pretty damn good at it. Like, I bet if I said, hm, 'security,' you'd know I meant-" "The autolocking door contingency we discussed," Harry fills in automatically, then deflates slightly, looking chagrined with himself.

Cisco beams at him, holding his hand out for a high-five. "See! We're already 80% of the way to a psychic bond." But Harry, grouch that he is, first leaves him hanging, and then uses a marker to push Cisco's hand back down.

"Alright, I'll give you that. We are *occasionally* on the same wavelength. Now stop changing the subject," he says sternly.

For about four seconds Cisco calculates the probability of being able to successfully deflect again, but he concludes that it's too long a shot to bother trying. So he runs his hand through his hair and tries to explain. "Okay, now that I'm saying this out loud, it sounds really dumb, but you've started calling me by my first name recently, and I thought you were trying to hint at something? Like, if I wanted to be called Cisco, then I had to reciprocate somehow? I don't know, I thought maybe you didn't like being called Harry, and it's not like I ever thought to ask you before," he finishes, giving a lame little shrug.

Harry is still looking at him like he's a puzzle that can't be solved, but his expression is unexpectedly soft. "That barely makes any sense, but. I guess it is my fault. I'd never extended that courtesy to you either, so we're even. Stop worrying about it. And I don't need you to call me Harrison; Harry is fine."

And perhaps it's weird that Cisco cares so much about this, when most of their relationship is built on annoying the everliving hell out of each other, but a rush of relief floods through him, knowing that Harry doesn't mind. "Good, because it would have been a real struggle for me to adjust. Besides, you should be honored to have been named by yours truly. My nicknaming prowess is world-renowned."

Harry's eyes crinkle when he's entertained but doesn't want to stop grimacing for a moment in order to smile. "Only amongst the criminal underground. In one city."

"Well, where else am I gonna get street cred from? Anyway, it suits you. You've got all this," he gestures grandly at Harry's bird-nest hair. "Therefore: Harry."

Harry snorts, unimpressed. "That's the worst reasoning I've heard in a long time. What if I were to go bald? Or just shave it all off." He mimics running a razor through his hair, brushing the locks into further disarray. Cisco shudders and grabs his wrist, holding him still with one hand and patting down a few stray tufts and curls with the other. Harry sits with uncharacteristic patience as Cisco combs through his soft hair.

"C'mon, who are you kidding, you would never. This crazy fluff is part of your signature look. That and your inclination toward all-black clothing like some some sort of blatantly suspicious burglar, which...you are. You're lucky you have pretty eyes, because the rest of the package is kind of a mess." He releases Harry's arm in order to frown critically at his monochromatic fashion choices of the day: black cardigan, gray shirt, and grayer pants.

"The press used to say I cleaned up well," Harry says, leaning back in his chair, one elbow propped up on the desk, as if to put himself on display for no good reason. It's not like Cisco needs the reminder that he's surrounded by obnoxiously good looking people.

"Dude, everyone cleans up well, if there's enough soap and combs involved. Even I become stunning in a suit and tie. Which means I'm only at my most attractive at funerals. Is that why I keep striking out? That's kind of fucked up," he muses.

Harry removes his glasses for the sole purpose of giving Cisco a clearer view of him rolling his eyes. "It would be, if it were accurate, but it's not. I know you've been on dates. You're plenty attractive year-round to...certain people. Quit wallowing in self-pity." Cisco just barks out a laugh and kicks at the wheels on Harry's chair, rolling him back a few inches. Someone who managed to get married and have a kid has no place trying to reassure Cisco on his hopeless romantic endeavors.

"I've been on four and a half dates since I've met you. Not many before that either. It's totally within my rights to wallow a little bit," Cisco proclaims. He makes one lazy spin in his chair before pointing at Harry. Accusing him. Harry just puts his hands up in surrender, waiting. "And you just quantified it yourself! Do you know what 'certain people' comprises? Reincarnated goddesses with soulmates and known thieves. That's almost literally it. 'Certain people' equals 'people who won't stick around,' not-"

Not cranky, brilliant, irritable physicists with a terrible ego and a wry sense of humor and a dangerously unchecked protective streak. Not people with PhDs in being a royal pain in the ass, who think sliding across the floor is a legitimate form of transportation. Not people who chew on marker caps and chug boiling hot coffee like it's ice water and fall asleep sitting up while still holding a screwdriver. Not people like Harry Wells.

Dammit. Cisco had been so sure he'd get over this stupid, idiotic infatuation once the Wells family returned to Earth-2, but he hadn't accounted for their absence only lasting a week. So *that's* apparently still an issue he needs to contend with.

Annnnnd now Cisco's fallen silent for too long, leaving Harry twirling his hand at him, trying to prompt the end of his sentence.

"Not what? Not movie stars? Not other metahumans? Not-"

"Not people who would stay. People who would try to make it work," Cisco explains, before Harry's guess become too accurate. He should stop talking, before he gives himself away or becomes too pitiful, but it's freeing, in a way, to vent to someone. "Caitlin and Ronnie were a forever kind of couple, before everything went south. Barry and Iris are taking things slow, but I don't think there's anything in the multiverse that can keep them apart. And here's me, unable to even make it to a third date with the same person. It's not the end of the world or anything – every other part of my life is awesome – but it'd be nice sometimes, I think, to have someone. To be loved, y'know?"

He wonders, broadly, in the way one does when they have no experience but plenty of daydreams, how it would feel to have somebody who looked at him like he hung the moon in the sky, but maybe that's aiming too high. He doesn't need to be loved like he's everything.

He would gladly settle for being enough. Being someone's first choice, if even only once in his life.

Harry's eyes are a shade darker than usual, more lightning storm sky than crystalline ice, and he's staring the way he normally does when he wants Cisco to read his mind, but this time, psychic bond or not, Cisco isn't sure what he wants him to say. He's afraid he's said too much again, put too many pieces of his patchwork heart out for scrutiny, to be snipped away at the seams, but no condemnation or derision falls from Harry's lips. Instead, he regards Cisco for a beat longer, before leaning forward in his chair to tell him, "You'll find someone. Somebody who appreciates all your idiosyncrasies, who can match your intelligence and your energy, and won't take your kindness for granted. Somebody who would never consider leaving you again. So finish your wallowing, Cisco, and help me clean up the slime." The way he says it sounds so simple, like a foregone conclusion, and Cisco finds himself ducking his head as he follows Harry over to grab a mop, unable to meet the searching gaze of those eyes any longer. To hear Harry using that total certainty to say something so kind is too much to bear. His face feels oddly hot, like he's blushing, but his heart is still intact, beating steadily, stitched up as best it could be.

"That's actually kind of comforting, coming from you. I'm starting to believe I won't really die alone," Cisco says, as they begin mopping up the mess, after collecting a sample for Caitlin. "Anyway, you never told me what the deal was with the name thing. I mean, don't get me wrong, I won't miss you growling 'Ramon' at me anymore, but why the change?"

Harry's mouth twists up, and Cisco knows he's probably fighting his own stubborn nature to avoid the question, but surprisingly, he gives in after a few seconds.

"I thought you would prefer it – if I called you by your first name. Before, I didn't have any intention of...becoming close with anyone here, so I didn't account for what you wanted-"

Ah. "You were being a dick, you mean."

Harry rolls his eyes, but there's the hint of a smile on his face as he wrings the mop out vigorously. "Yes. I was being a dick, because I assumed none of you would ever matter to me. I was wrong, so now that Jesse and I are here to stay for the indefinite future, I thought I could make at least a minimal effort-"

"Don't want anyone calling you an overachiever, huh?" Cisco interrupts, just to be annoying, forcing Harry to raise his voice in order to continue.

"-to address you the way you would prefer."

Cisco knows he's grinning like a loon, but he doesn't really care how silly it makes him look. "So, basically, you realized that despite yourself, not only do you not hate us, you ended up *liking* us. You *are* soft, somewhere down there." He boops Harry in the center of his chest, pressing down gently. "Chewy nougat center inside, under the bittersweet shell."

"Sea salt caramel center, actually," Harry says, wrapping his calloused hand around Cisco's finger to lower it. The brief spark of skin to skin contact causes a low drop of pressure in Cisco's gut, leaving a slight ache behind and a deep mortification that he's so weak.

“Makes sense, considering how salty about everything you are.” Harry’s released his finger by now, but the phantom touch of his hand remains. They’re standing in each other’s space again, so close that it would be awkward if they hadn’t already become accustomed to it from working together. Cisco clutches at his mop with his other hand, willing himself not to reach out again, but luckily Barry finally finishes the world’s longest speedster shower and appears before Cisco makes a terrible, terrible mistake.

“So, I tried to clean as much of it off as possible, but I got some inside instead?” Barry says, smiling winsomely, doing his best to channel Bambi. He holds the suit out, but it’s still tacky with gross coppery goop.

Cisco receives the suit sadly, pinching a clean spot between two fingers. “Bro. I had one request.”

“I know, I’m sorry! I tried my best. But I think with some rubbing alcohol it should come out no problem.” Barry scratches at his still damp hair, trying his best to look contrite, and Cisco shoves at his shoulder affectionately. Stupid charming dork. Iris, with her ability to rein in Barry’s nonsense even when he’s using his doe-eyes of doom on her, is much stronger than Cisco is. He thinks it’s her years of exposure that have developed into immunity.

“Aight then, you finish mopping this and we’ll sort out the suit,” Cisco says, pointing down the hall at the long trail Barry’s left behind. He hands his mop over; Harry does the same.

“You too?” Barry asks, when he finds himself holding two mops.

Harry shrugs, starting down the hall with Cisco. “You heard him. We’re sorting out the suit. Just consider this a part of your mission. Go figure out what makes the slime such an effective sedative.”

“Will do.” Gripping both mops, Barry speeds down the hallway.

Cisco makes sure to keep a safe distance apart from Harry as they walk together, though his face must show some signs of unease, because Harry makes a comment.

“You’re overthinking something again. Didn’t need the psychic bond this time to tell me that. Even your facial features manage to be noisy.”

“Nah, I’m just pondering the Empire’s decision to blow up entire planets. I get why, but it’s a pretty huge waste of resources,” Cisco lies, and that’s enough to turn the conversation to an easy subject until he can keep his emotions contained again. He’s done it before, it shouldn’t be too hard to do it again. He just has to stop thinking about it – let it fade into the background like ambient noise.

Sometimes it’s easy to forget. It’s not like these feelings consume his every waking moment or anything. He’s not even pining. It’s just an unobtrusive fondness that’s grown slightly out of control. It’s the feeling of fulfillment that comes hand in hand with meeting someone who can understand you from just a shared glance. The weightless sense of contentment whenever they get along, and the flare of heat whenever they quarrel and fall back into the old steps of the verbal dance they’ve come to know. It’s the security of unexpected trust – finally, after so

much betrayal, and so much heartbreak – that falls with reassuring weight on his shoulders, forged even after their initial missteps and mistrust. It's everything meaningful and nothing of significance all at once, just another part of his wacky everyday life.

So he forgets that these feelings are even feelings, because they're so constant, so present in the back of his mind, in the corners of the room and the filmy, fluid hours past midnight. He forgets until Harry crosses back over to another universe; he forgets until he can feel the timelines shifting in the air and under his skin, and his heart begins to give out; he forgets until the course of history is being rewritten and he feels his presence being erased out of space. And then he remembers, as the seconds are slipping away out of his grasp, and he thinks to himself: *I think I would have liked to see him again. Just one last time.*

Maybe that's the tragedy, though, of living so many lives though so many timelines. There are just some lessons he'll never learn. There are some cuts that will sting every time, even as he grows used to all the other hurts and bruises. Here he is again, still harboring this gentle affection, no closer to closure.

But it's okay. As long as nothing else changes, with enough time, he can move on. He'll get there eventually.

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However, Harry Wells continues to be the most difficult person in every plane of existence, so instead of leaving Cisco to get over him in peace, he keeps acting weird and nice and makes things worse. Leaving Cisco notes when he makes off with something from his workshop, bringing him coffee on occasion when they're both mostly dead from an all-nighter, even giving into movie night once in a blue moon without the need for excessive cajoling.

It's not just happening to Cisco, either. He calls everyone by their first name now, besides the occasional "Dr. Snow" and "Detective West". Cisco catches him talking music and swapping kid stories with Joe, and he seems to have been inducted into some kind of mysterious exercise club with Iris. He even gives Caitlin a high-five once (which, what the hell, why doesn't Cisco get a high five?) and compliments Barry more freely than before, with an almost fatherly pride. Cisco had hoped he would get his sharp tongue under control, but he didn't expect this level of change.

All in all, it's freaking Cisco out.

The final straw happens bright and early one Monday morning, when Cisco stumbles into work still halfway unconscious and mostly hungover. He thinks his Zelda shirt might be on backwards, and he's not certain he didn't hitch a ride on the back of an old man's truck instead of taking the bus, but regardless, he made it to the lab in one piece, so a win's a win.

Caitlin isn't in yet, but he almost gets bowled over by Jesse jogging by, who's off to the newly rebuilt Mercury Labs for her internship.

"Whoa there, thought you were a zombie for a second," she laughs, slowing her run to walk him over to the cortex. "You look like you're carrying a deep hunger for human flesh."

“I think I'm more likely to be zombie food than one of the undead myself. They can smell my delicious engineer brains from miles away. I'd never make it out alive,” he sighs. Flopping down into his chair, he pulls his arms into his t-shirt to try and turn it around.

“Really? You seem like you would have a zombie apocalypse survival plan,” she says, helping him pull the fabric until his shirt is facing the right way.

“Oh, I definitely do, but after that time Girder came back I'm pretty sure the odds aren't in my favor.”

“What about your powers, though? Give 'em a taste of that vibrational blast thing you can do, and I'm guessing they won't be hungry for your brains anymore.”

“Dude, if I had that much control over my powers, you'd already see me blasting stuff left and right. Coolest thing I can do right now is open a breach; I can't even sustain one. Still working on the actually useful skills.”

“Well, if nothing else, being able to open breaches is awesome,” Jesse tells him, smiling. “I still miss home sometimes, but I'm glad we got to come back to Earth-2 and see you all again.”

“Didn't we agree that your Earth is Earth-2?” he asks, and she just laughs again, hiking her backpack up higher. “Let me know the next time you miss home too much; we can take a field trip. I'd like another look at your STAR Labs without worrying about an evil speedster running around,” Cisco offers, and she beams at him, turning to leave.

“Okay, maybe sometime in the future. I don't want you to over-exert yourself again; you look tired enough as it is. Stop staying up so late!”

“It wasn't that late,” he protests. “You were right there karaokeing along with the rest of us last night!”

“Yeah, but I went to sleep right afterwards instead of drunkenly trying to convince my dad to help build a magnetization gun.” She smirks at him, wiggling her arms around. “When Caitlin said you were a clingy drunk, I didn't realize just how clingy that meant. You should've seen Dad's face when you wouldn't let go of his leg.”

“Ugh.” It's probably for the best that he can't remember anything besides singing a duet with Iris and Barry zipping him home. It's not like he doesn't already have too many unnecessary memories crowding his brain; the last thing he needs is a reminder of what an barnacle he is when inebriated around people he has dangerous, no-good, squiggly feelings about. “How embarrassed should I be when I see him?”

“Hard to say. My advice is not to bring anything up. If you're lucky, he'll pretend he can't remember anything when he notices you can't. Though,” and she wrinkles her nose, “sometimes that just drives him to want to embarrass you more. Good luck!”

“Have fun with Dr. McGee,” he calls after her, and slumps over on the desk as he waits for his files to load. He's starting to regret sticking to his old work schedule, especially since

Barry wouldn't care if he showed up to work late. He should think about repurposing one of their spare rooms to make himself a sleeping alcove, so he can just crawl off to bed straight from his workshop like Harry does. All he needs are some blankets and cushions, or even like a yoga mat he can lie on.

Ten minutes later, while Cisco's eyes are glossing over from trying to read whatever the hell he typed while drunk yesterday, Harry walks by and leaves a cup behind on the desk on his way to the medbay. Cisco turns his head to see if maybe this is one of those times Harry's feeling kind enough to bring him a cup too, but when he notices it's just Harry's white STAR Labs mug sitting solitary by the screen, he turns back over to keep reading. He'll have to crawl over to Jitters later if he doesn't feel more alive in half an hour.

Harry passes through again, holding tweezers and gauze, and pauses to look at Cisco melting into the desk. "Your coffee's going cold," he says on his way out.

"What coffee?" Cisco asks in a mumble.

"What do you mean, 'what coffee'? What else could it be?" He backtracks a few steps to push the mug closer to Cisco's face.

Squinting at the cup in suspicion, Cisco shakes his head. "No, this is your coffee. Mine doesn't exist yet. Probably. Or it could, theoretically. Quantum state coffee..." he sighs, deleting another line of babble in his document.

"Are you still drunk? Because your blathering is even less coherent than usual."

"You'd know if I were still drunk," Cisco says, because he's an idiot. Way to open the gate for discussion of his own mortifying behavior.

There's the beginnings of a smirk forming on his face, but Harry doesn't say anything besides, "Fair enough. Which means you're just sleep-deprived and hungover, so drink your coffee." He actually picks up the cup this time and plonks it down right in front of Cisco, who just stares back at him like he's gone mad.

"This is yours. It's in your mug."

"Technically, as you've all reminded me before, this is Barry's mug, since he owns everything in this lab. He won't mind if you use it; you've done so before."

"But I stopped using it once you claimed it. You love this mug. You make hideous Gollum faces when anyone else touches it. All 'my preciousssss' and everything." Cisco doesn't know how to articulate what should be very simple to explain. It's Harry's favorite mug. Harry, who's constantly stealing hammers and pens and pulse rifles with no intention of returning them, and who will rumble like a territorial alley cat if someone tries to borrow a tool before he's finished with it – how could he be willing to share his precious mug?

Unfortunately, the attempt to express this with only his gaping mouth and two short choppy hand swipes in the air doesn't end in success. Harry just shakes his head slowly and gestures toward the coffee himself. "And I also love having a conscious and competent lab partner."

As an afterthought, he narrows his eyes and tells Cisco, "It's not poisoned. Or laced with anything. I know you think I have questionable morals but I wouldn't try to use you as a guinea pig without informing you first."

"No, I'm not worried about that. You're chaotic neutral, leaning toward good, but you're also a scientist by trade. Not enough controls here for an experiment to be meaningful," Cisco mumbles, finally taking the cup into his hands when it seems like Harry hasn't just randomly lost his mind. It's still fairly hot, a liberal amount of cream already applied, with the faint scent of cinnamon wafting out. "You're also not a *total* whackjob, so I trust you not do anything to me. I just- I guess I didn't expect you to be willing to lend me your mug," he finally gets out. He takes a long sip before he complicates the explanation any further. It's actually really good: not as overloaded with syrup and whipped cream as what he gets from Jitters, but Harry's clearly been paying attention to how sweet he takes his coffee. He releases an involuntary, happy little sigh.

That seems to satisfy Harry, who nods once down at him. "So you *do* know how to drink without slurping. My suspicions have been confirmed."

Cisco's deeply tempted to slurp vigorously now just to be contrary, but he's filled with too much delicious coffee and too much goodwill to do so. "Yeah, you found out my big secret. I'm not a slurper by nature. Don't tell anyone, okay?"

"Wouldn't want people to think there exists an activity that you can undertake quietly, would we?" Harry asks, amused. Cisco takes a few more tiny, silent sips, savoring the flavor as well as the caffeine starting to circulate through his body.

"We would not. Just like we don't want anyone to know you're caramel inside, right? They'll be coming 'round to bother you for favors all the time if they knew how nice you can be. I'm keeping the Harry Wells special coffee service a closely guarded secret," Cisco declares, his brain finally at some sort of functioning capacity.

"Don't start getting any expectations. It won't be a regular occurrence," Harry warns, as he begins heading out of the cortex.

"Special occasions only, like me being hungover as hell. Got it. Thanks, by the way. It's perfect." Cisco raises his mug in a quasi-toast, and Harry lifts his hand in acknowledgement as he exits.

Things are fine until Cisco finishes his beverage, now fully awake, and takes another look at the mug. It's definitely the one he thinks it is, which means Harry definitely just made Cisco perfect coffee in his favorite mug for no other reason than because he knew Cisco would be tired and hungover. In the grand scheme of acts of kindness, it's not a huge action, but it's the nicest thing in a long time that anyone's done for him simply because they could.

And it's more of a problem than Cisco expected.

He's supposed to be trying to overcome this sad, hopeless crush, but Harry keeps on continuing on his quiet crusade of kindness, chipping away at Cisco's attempts to gradually move on. It's not exactly easy when he keeps finding more and more reasons for this

fondness he harbors to bloom into something more. Something that would way over complicate his life and ruin a perfectly good friendship. It took them long enough to even arrive at where they are now, and he really doesn't want it all to implode in his face.

This, he decides, is Harry's fault, for adding confusion into their dynamics. They were doing perfectly fine sciencing together and snarking at each other and pretending not to be friends, and Harry just had to go and mess things up by making Cisco remember his dumb feelings. But if Cisco can figure out what's driving Harry to be the way he is, then he'll be able to better understand how to barricade his heart against it.

Opening up a new document, he begins compiling a list of reasons for the recent change. He has to get to the bottom of this before things go too far.

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After thinking things over alone for a few days, Cisco decides he needs another pair of eyes on this case, to help him distinguish between the real evidence and the false leads. There's only one suitable candidate for this job.

"You think Harry might be another fake?!" Iris whispers over her coffee. They're sequestered away at the most private table they could find in Jitters. Iris was the obvious choice, with her journalist skills and natural curiosity. He hadn't wanted to alarm Caitlin, or cause Barry or Joe to do anything rash. "More body-snatchers? Or is it a shape-shifter?"

"Okay, that's just one hypothesis. One that I'm actually not too attached to – it would be just too insane, right, if we had another imposter Dr. Wells again? I feel like we've reached the limit on that. I'm inclined to think Harry's just like...going through some major life changes or something and the weird behavior is a side effect."

"A major life change like...dying?" Iris asks, reading off his list of possibilities. "That's a little morbid. Wouldn't he tell someone if that were the case? Jesse would know. I'm crossing this one off," she decides, and scratches it from the list, with no complaints from Cisco. It's not like he wanted to consider that possibility anyway.

"So, probably not dying, and probably not an imposter. Do you think he could be gearing up to deliver some bad news? Like he went Earth-2 bankrupt or the cops are after him again."

"Honestly, do you think it's possible that he's just...decided he wants to be nicer to us?" Iris asks. She looks cheerily amused by Cisco's indignant hand flapping and coffee-cup waving.

"I *guess* that's a possibility. But why now? He's nice enough already. Obviously for an adjusted value of 'nice' that accounts for the rest of his personality, but it was fine before." It was easier before, is what he doesn't tell Iris. It's much more difficult to let his feelings fade into the background and out of existence when Harry's skulking around being bizarrely sweet. He would assume that Harry took their little talk in his workshop too much to heart, but the issue started long before then.

Iris nods, but tilts her head, thinking it over. "Maybe he's finally allowing us in. He changed a lot between when he first got here and by the time we dealt with Zoom, right? But even at the

end, he and Jesse were probably always intending to return home, so it's likely he was still keeping us at a distance. Now though, as long as they're sticking around, maybe he's finally letting all his walls down.” Iris tucks a lock of hair back behind her ear, then reaches out to rest her hand on his. “Especially around you. You two have your spats, but it's pretty obvious how much you've bonded.”

She could be right. Perhaps it really is as simple as familiarity finally settling in, but Cisco isn't quite totally convinced. “I just can't believe the answer could be something so easy. Everything that happens to us is always such a huge production.”

With a laugh, she squeezes his hand. “Then shouldn't you be glad that something's simple for once? Harry's not being weird, he's just trying to be friendly. Let him let you in, Cisco. Accept the change.”

“Fine,” he sighs. “I'll accept it, for now. We'll have a great time being super best buddies,” *and I'll just start digging my own grave in the meantime*, he refrains from saying. “Keep an eye out though. I don't want to be caught off guard in case there's something more sinister afoot.” Maybe he'll get lucky and it'll turn out to be some elaborate trap. Or maybe Harry's just going to be pleasant until Cisco's heart implodes from the stress of blocking it out.

“Sure. You make it sound like such a chore, but honestly, you're just as fond of him as he is of you. Why is this weirding you out so much?”

Because I'm actually much more fond of him than he is of me. Because if he keeps this up, I won't be able to ignore how I feel anymore.

Iris has a way about her – an ineffable trustworthiness and levelheaded composure – that makes Cisco want to tell her his troubles, but that would be extremely stupid, so he shrugs and turns to his go-to excuse. “Guess I'm just inclined to suspect nice people these days. It's pretty messed up, but after Dr. Wells and Jay? I'm still a little paranoid.”

Iris' dark eyes soften. “Don't worry, I get it. We've been burned too many times before. But you *know* Harry. You know his motivations and you know what makes him tick, and after all this, I think he's proven himself. He's the one you turned to when you knew our timeline was collapsing, and he's the one who pulled through for us. I don't think we have to worry about another betrayal.”

“Okay, yeah, it wouldn't make any sense at this point. You're right,” Cisco says, blowing out a long stream of air over the surface of the rapidly melting whipped cream on his latte.

“I usually am,” she says with a smile, before gesturing toward the door. “C'mon, let's take these to go. There's this little bookshop I found the other day, and I think they have that comic you were looking for.”

They leave Jitters to brave the cold, windy day, Cisco trying to explain to her the rebooted continuity of his comic, but in the back of his mind, he continues to worry about his situation.

He's no closer to a resolution, and the best solution so far is to give up and accept his fate. At this point, he's almost tempted. It would so easy to just let go. He's already more than

halfway there, and he's no stranger to falling for people he can't keep, people who are no good for him. Nor to piecing himself back together after the inevitable heartache.

And it wouldn't have to fuck up their relationship. Not if Harry never finds out. Cisco's used to wearing his heart on his sleeve, but if he's cautious enough, clever enough, he could probably hide his true feelings. The mask just needs to outlast the fall and the mend, outlive his heartbreak, until he can bring himself back to equilibrium.

It would be alright to fall in love with Harry, as long as no one figures it out. Cisco isn't a fantastic actor, but he can do this. He has to. There's no other way things could possibly go, and he isn't giving the Wells family another reason to leave again.

So. That's the way things stand, then. Time to make some plans.

Plan A

- 1) Do not fall in love with Harry Wells.

Plan B (in the event that Plan A fails):

- 1) Do not tell anybody that you are in love with Harry Wells.
- 2) Immediately fall out of love.
- 3) Continue being super best buddies.

Plan C (in the event that Plan B fails):

- 1) Just don't fuck up Plan B!!
- 2) Seriously, don't.

Plan D (in the event that Plan C fails):

- 1) Ask Barry to rewind time so that you can either:
 - i) Prevent Plans A through C from failing, or
 - ii) Die from temporal and dimensional incompatibility

That should cover all his bases. Cisco has totally got this.

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Cisco has totally not got this.

The easiest way to move on is to get some distance, which is virtually impossible. He knew that they spent a lot of time together, but he hadn't understood just how inescapable Harry really was until now. They work together, obviously, which already occupies a huge chunk of Cisco's day, every day. It doesn't help that they don't necessarily work next to each other, so much as some mix of under, over, and on top of, as one of them crawls around on the floor looking for the right battery, and the other one runs between the whiteboard, and the welding torch, and settles half-perched in a chair for ten minutes at a time. This doesn't even account for the frequent days that Cisco wakes up confused and lying under a sheet of drafting paper or in a small nest of lugnuts, having fallen asleep on the floor next to Harry, who's already awake and hacking through a hunk of scrap metal.

"Coffee?" he groans, rubbing at the indentation of a pencil on his cheek.

“Good morning to you too, sunshine,” Harry says, sawing away a ruckus, only this disgustingly, unnaturally cheerful when he knows it will cause Cisco physical agony.

“Coffee...” Cisco wails, flinging a dry-erase marker in Harry’s general direction, and missing by several yards.

“It’s on the table. You’ll regret it if you don’t brush your teeth afterwards.”

“Bwugh.” He’s already downed most of the contents of Harry’s white mug, even though the lower half of his body is still glued to the floor like a beached merman. “You’re a life-saver. A god-send. The best of men,” he gurgles, unintelligible, cradling the mug tenderly as he wiggles his ankles to see if he’s up to moving any time soon.

“Recorded and saved for posterity,” Harry says, raising his wrist so Cisco can see his watch. Cisco flips him off and continues inchworming to the exit.

In between the late nights and the increasingly common coffee mornings, they wind up eating lunch together at least three or four times a week with Caitlin and Barry. Harry steals Cisco’s fries whenever he’s too busy dipping them in Barry’s strawberry milkshake to notice, and Cisco takes revenge by reassembling his burgers in non-optimal filling order before handing them over. After realizing that Harry’s become an aggressive scavenger with non-discriminating tastes since he so often forgets to feed himself at regular intervals, Cisco started bringing him the leftovers from whatever new place he and Caitlin try when they go out for lunch dates, and now it’s too late to stop. Every time he returns to the lab, Harry materializes from the shadows, hand outstretched to receive his take-out box. Caitlin’s invited him to come along with them before, but he just declines and keeps eating Cisco’s food.

It isn’t just leftovers that draw him out like a vulture. Some days, candy can’t satisfy Cisco’s itching need for sweets, so he hijacks the secret lab kitchen for his own personal use, to make linzer torte and tembleque, Nanaimo bars and homemade popsicles. Harry catches him one evening in the middle of making a giant batch of chocolate chip cookies for Barry’s birthday, and stations himself on a stool looking under-caffeinated and scruffy, watching Cisco cream the butter and sugar together with the refurbished stand mixer he found at a flea market. When the dough is all mixed, Cisco tasks him with scooping out balls of dough to be baked while he washes the dishes.

“Why piano concertos?” Harry asks halfway through the 5th dozen. “Your tastes usually run more upbeat.” His cookie dough balls are on the lumpy side, since he hasn’t yet mastered the art of scooping, but they’re perfectly spaced on the tray. Cisco looks up from where he’s sliding cooled cookies into a tin, over to his phone from which Grieg is being played.

“It’s an old habit from when I was little,” Cisco says, putting the lid on the first tin. “My mom used to teach me how to cook while Dante was practicing in the other room – since if I couldn’t play like him, I could at least learn something useful – and I guess it stuck. It’s easier to concentrate when I have my baking playlist on. Some of the tracks are actually recordings of Dante himself.”

Harry’s eyebrow inches up. After placing the next tray in the oven, he returns to his stool to wait until the nine minutes are up. Cisco pretends he doesn’t see him sneaking a blob of raw

dough into his mouth before he says, off-handedly, “How supportive of you.”

It doesn't take a genius to know there's a question hidden there. “Yeah, well, there's nothing like the real thing to get me in cooking mode. Dante and I – we're better now. I mean, we still don't hang out much, but when we do it's...comfortable. Less tense.” After the B1 debacle he had called his brother up, to hear his voice again in some context other than distress. Dante had been a much bigger part of his life in the other timeline, and though it wasn't really a great life, Cisco does miss that connection with his brother that he didn't get to have here. They've been slowly reconnecting since the Rupture situation, but all the timeline nonsense gave Cisco an extra push to put in the effort to mend their relationship, and Dante has been responding in kind.

By the time they finish, Cisco's filled three tins. He puts the extra dozen and a half into a large freezer bag and hands it over to Harry, who frowns at the offering, looking lost.

“Cookies, Harry. They're for eating,” Cisco tells him patiently.

“I already ate two ounces of dough,” Harry says gruffly, and Cisco laughs at him, suddenly overwhelmed by how charmed he is by this ridiculous, misanthropic millionaire nerd who allowed himself to be conscripted into baking cookies for a chance to steal some raw dough.

“And if you get salmonella, Caitlin's gonna be pissed. Have a cookie. I promise it's still good even if it's been through the oven.”

Harry fishes one cookie out of the bag and takes a tentative bite, as if Cisco's lying for some dastardly reason, then finishes the rest in two large chomps. It leaves a trace of chocolate behind at the corner of his lips, which Cisco briefly considers licking clean, before his brain reboots and he realizes that he's a gigantic fool. Instead, he hands Harry a napkin and stacks his hands high with Barry's cookie tins.

“Watch your crumbs, Cookie Monster. Come back next week; I'll teach you how to make arroz con dulce,” he says, before fleeing to his car.

Harry does, stalking in on Tuesday night around the time that Cisco goes to check on his soaking rice, and they make a bowl to be shared with everyone the next morning. It's such a hit with the others that they find themselves making flan the next week, and besitos de coco the week after. Harry's a shockingly docile student, until they get to any technique that he already knows, and then Cisco has to engage him in aerial combat to reclaim control over the mixing bowl and the kitchen. Over the last two weeks, though, since Iris has become concerned over the amount of sugar Joe's suddenly ingesting all the time, they've changed course from sweet to savory, and Cisco finds himself calling his grandparents up for old family recipes, because Harry's decided he can't graduate from STAR Labs' underground culinary class until he's learned a cookbook's worth of Puerto Rican dishes.

On the weeknights they're not cooking, they're often occupied with Barry's officially sanctioned Team Flash bonding activities, which means that the only time Cisco gets any distance is when he's alone in his apartment. And it's nice to get some time to himself, but he's social by nature, and he really doesn't want to increase his time spent away from his

chosen family, so as things are, the ratio of time spent with Harry and time spent without Harry isn't in favor of his plan.

All this, combined with the way they navigate their spaces in such a way that they're rarely more than half a room's width apart, is a major stress factor in Cisco's life.

Even now, at this very moment, Harry's probably only standing three feet shy of him despite all the space in the cortex, though he's not completely sure, since Cisco's mind is elsewhere. In Caitlin's apartment, four hours and eleven minutes from now, to be exact. He takes note of the clock on her wall, and the food on the plate she's holding with one hand as she tries to reach her fallen bookmark without getting off the couch. Her bag is sitting on the floor by her side, but there's no sign of her keys either way. The vibe ripples at the edges as he decides he won't be getting much more information, and he pulls himself back to the present.

"So what did you vibe?" Harry asks, reaching out to remove the glasses from Cisco's head, careful not to tangle any strands of his hair. His long fingers finally pull the headgear away, and Cisco has to resist from following his touch. This seems to be happening a lot recently; Cisco's a handsy person already, but it's gotten much worse since Harry seems to be physically demonstrative in an absent kind of way. Once he lets his guard down around someone the way he has the team, he has the tendency to touch them without thinking, leaving soft, unconscious pats to the arm or shoulder as affirmation or to announce he's walking by, something that Cisco instinctively mirrors in response. Cisco hadn't noticed so much before, but now he's hyper-aware of it, which just makes it all the more awkward for him.

If he thinks about it too much, he tenses up like a coiled spring about to shoot away, but if he *doesn't* think about it, then he's afraid one day he'll forget his boundaries and go too far, doing something embarrassing like latching on to Harry and never letting go. But it's not as if he can suddenly stop touching only Harry: it would stand out too much. And he can't stop touching everyone, either: they know how tactile he is, and someone would be bound to comment on how distant he's become. So now he's using all this brainpower trying to calculate exactly how much is an appropriate amount to touch your platonic friends, and it is a *total waste of time and energy*! He shouldn't have to be exerting so much effort. Plan A fucking sucks.

Escaping from Harry's gravitational pull, but trying not to be squirrely about it, he strides closer to Caitlin instead. "Our good Dr. Snow...is going to eat Thai food later tonight," Cisco announces, and Caitlin claps a hand to her mouth.

"Oh! I *was* thinking of ordering delivery," she says as he returns her ID card. "I couldn't choose between that new vegetarian place and the Thai restaurant near the theater, but I guess that decides it."

"But no details on when you'll next lose your keys. Tada, total mastery of unhelpful precognition and useless parlor tricks. That's gonna be super useful to Barry." Cisco slides back into his chair in defeat. He's been training for a couple of weeks now to sharpen his powers and get them under control. Harry's been tirelessly open to helping him train, no longer motivated by a selfish need to use Cisco as a tool for his own gain since Zoom is gone – now just genuinely curious about the extent of Cisco's abilities. He doesn't push anymore

when Cisco decides he's at his limit; without desperation driving him, he's fairly respectful of boundaries. Unfortunately, Harry turning over a new leaf to become a better coach hasn't really been turning up a lot of results. If Cisco's making any significant progress his abilities sure don't show it. To top it all off, he still can't figure out how to stop his unconscious vibes: the ones that haunt his dreams with bits and pieces from his B1 life.

"So you can't yet vibe the next time certain events might happen, but at least you saw something in my future. It could be relevant somehow," Caitlin tells him with a tiny Caitlin smile. "Maybe I better pay attention to where I throw my bag when I reach for my wallet later to pay the delivery boy."

Cisco smiles back, thankful for her quiet encouragement. "That's an optimistic interpretation, especially coming from you, but I'll take it. You're feeling spicy today, aren't you? There were a lot of peppers on your plate."

"I must have been saving them for you. You know I'm never feeling ~spicy~, " Caitlin says, emphasizing the last word with wide eyes and jazz hands, and he laughs, profoundly fond of everything about her. She cants her head toward Harry, half-consulting him when she asks, "So the vibes still need some work, but what about your breaches? I know you've been getting better at making them. Is Jesse still planning to come back today? Can you open a breach without your goggles?"

"They're fine, she is, and we're about to find out," Harry answers her, tapping them each on the shoulder as he passes by, motioning for them to follow him. They head to a cramped closet that they'd mapped to wind up in Harry's office on Earth-2, which is where they dropped Jesse off a week ago. After some testing on whether Cisco's powers were developed enough to keep opening breaches without trouble, and on whether it was okay to travel between worlds without the assistance of a speedster, they deemed it safe enough to hop between Earth-1 and Earth-2 on occasion. The West-Allens left on a family trip while things in Central City seemed quiet, so Caitlin and Cisco went to take a furtive tour around Earth-2 STAR Labs while Jesse left to meet her friends and Harry caught up with Earth-2 Dr. McGee to make sure the lab was running smoothly and his Central City was doing well. That was somewhat of a surprise, learning that Mercury Labs never existed in Harry's world, and that she'd been working at STAR Labs since its inception.

"And you're okay just turning over your lab to Dr. McGee to run whenever you're here with us?" Cisco asked around the fancy Earth-2 lollipop he swiped from the reception desk, surprised at how cavalier Harry seemed about the whole situation.

"I convinced Chris back when we were working on our theses to come join the research lab I was starting. She's been trying to usurp my position ever since," Harry responded. "I suppose it's about time I give in, before she resorts to poisoning me for it. I'm not very popular with the public right now, anyway, so having her as the face of STAR Labs going forward wouldn't hurt. We've already begun enacting the STAR Labs community enrichment program under her, and it's been well-received so far. When Jesse decides she wants to take over the lab-"

"Don't you mean *'if* Jesse decides she wants to take over the lab'?" Caitlin interjected. She had a lollipop as well, still wrapped, but she tucked it into Cisco's candy pocket.

“Fine, *if* Jesse decides she wants to take her place at the helm, Chris would be more than happy to raise her up as her protégée. Anyway, when you two are done gawking, meet me back here in the office. Don't cause trouble for Dr. Hewitt.”

At this point, his breaches, while not large, are stable enough to hold form for a couple of days. That one had been opened and closed with the assistance of his goggles, but Cisco's been trying to slowly learn to focus his powers until he won't need them anymore. Standing in front of the closet door, Cisco closes his eyes and holds his arm out to try again today without the glasses. He does his best to concentrate on separating the vibrations of his universe from the threads of every other one, carding through until he can isolate the membranous difference between Earth-1 and Earth-2, but there's too much of everything. Too much air, too many people, too many walls and floors and matter; he can't focus on opening a breach when there are so many frequencies thrumming around him. Not yet, at least.

“Sorry, guys. It's not happening,” he says, opening his eyes. Neither of the other two look as disappointed as he feels.

“That's what you have these for,” Harry says, returning the glasses to him.

With the glasses on, there's no issue at all sifting through to find what he needs; he opens up a breach while wondering how he might hone his abilities to lock onto a frequency without the use of any tech. But that's something to ponder another day. It's almost time to pick Jesse up. “Ready to go?” he asks, taking the glasses off.

“I'll keep watch here,” Caitlin tells the other two. “See you again soon.”

They nod and step through the breach. Even though he's experienced it a few times now without Barry to escort him through, it's still a very bizarre experience. The trip is longer, though time seems to lose all meaning in the portal when they're being bombarded with all these other universes passing through. They land, as expected, in Harry's office; Dr. McGee is currently at a meeting, which is why they scheduled this time to meet up, so they wouldn't disturb her. Jesse isn't in yet; it's still ten minutes to four, so Cisco hovers around the breach so he doesn't get distracted by whatever it is that's lying in pieces on the desk. They're not staying long, and he knows he'll have a hard time pulling away once he starts fiddling.

Harry checks his watch, then walks over to the door, clearly intending to go somewhere, so Cisco starts to follow, until the other man holds his hand up to halt him.

“No, you should stay here to meet Jesse,” Harry says, hand on the doorknob. “If she doesn't see one of us here when she returns, she'll wander off to one of the research floors and it'll take all day to get her to leave.”

“Oh, uh, okay. I'll just be here, then. Hanging out,” Cisco trails off awkwardly. He feels shifty, standing around alone, but more than that he feels oddly anxious at the thought of Harry heading off on his own. Not that there's any danger or threat that he can pinpoint, but there's a building fear that for some reason Harry's going to walk through that door and never return. It's completely unfounded; he knows that Harry and Jesse have begun building a life on Earth-1, but there are too many echoes of past goodbyes here, and his blood churns unpleasantly, sour in his veins as he instinctively braces for another departure.

Harry catches him tensing up and pauses with the door ajar, before walking back to join him. “Hey. Cisco. I’m not disappearing on you,” Harry tells him firmly, hand patting his arm briskly. “Just stay here for another minute after Jesse arrives. I need to go get something, so don’t leave without me.” He stares, unblinking, until Cisco nods in understanding.

“Okay, sure. We’ll wait here for you,” Cisco says, when his body finally registers that Harry isn’t leaving him behind. The hand on Cisco’s arm squeezes once, briefly, and then Harry walks out the door. There’s the lingering comfort of the pressure and warmth of Harry’s hand against his skin, even after he’s alone.

It still feels strange to be waiting by himself, but at least his illogical heart has calmed down, knowing that he won’t be deserted here. Jesse skips in only a few minutes later, waving brightly at him when she spots him lounging around on a chair next to the breach.

“The wayward genius returns! Did you have fun cavorting with your friends while we were working our butts off?” he asks, and she snorts, batting at him.

“I heard they loved you and Caitlin in the bio division. Dr. Milligan and Dr. Choi, especially, and Dr. Milligan usually hates *everybody*.” She flops into a chair beside him, slightly tanner than he remembers.

“Caitlin’s studies in metahuman physiology were a big hit. I was just the eyecandy.” Cisco tosses his hair back with an elegant swish, eliciting a laugh from Jesse, who fails to copy him with her own shorter waves.

“You do pull off the cute nerd look really well. At least four people who work here have a crush on you,” she teases. “I dunno if it’s the engineering skills or the luscious hair, but you’re pretty popular with a certain type.”

He squints at her, suspicious of this report, and she smirks back. “I know you’re baiting me, but I don’t know to what end,” he says, still giving her the side-eye.

“I’m not! I just thought you’d want to know!” She looks the picture of innocence, but behind her wide eyes is the vaguely frazzled air of someone who hasn’t completely thought through what they’re going to say. “There are some *people* who have demonstrated interest in you,” she continues, mouth pursing as she tries to feel for the proper words, “and maybe you’d be receptive to, um, overtures from one such person? If they were to like...court you? With the intention of something long-term?”

She sounds totally out of her depth here, which rarely happens, so Cisco figures he knows what this is about. He shakes his head, smiling. Young love, how sweet. “Is this like- are you practicing asking Wally out with me? This is *way* too roundabout; you’re just gonna confuse him,” he tells her. It’s actually good she did a test run with him first; Cisco knows all about being the nerd without any game. “Wally’s a nice guy, and he’s pretty obviously into you too, so I think just coming right out with it is probably your best play. Invite him to the movies or something.”

“Oh my god, this isn’t about Wally,” Jesse splutters, turning pink. “This is about you! Look, let’s just say that I know someone-” She cuts off abruptly when Harry enters the room

holding a roll of paper and a USB.

“Good, you're both here,” he says, smiling in that way that's only intended for his daughter. She jumps up and hugs him, which is all well and good until he pulls back to scrutinize her face, not buying her sunny disposition. “What have you been up to?” Harry asks, his gaze flickering between Jesse and Cisco.

“Man, don't ask me. I'm totally lost,” Cisco says, backing away with his hands up.

“Nothing, dad,” Jesse says dismissively. “We were just talking.”

“I've never heard anything more ominous,” Harry says, still studying them both with a furrowed brow.

“Normally I wouldn't blame you, but I'm still stumped about our conversation,” Cisco says. “Anyway, when y'all are done hugging, we can go home.”

“Aw, is that your way of saying you want a hug too, Cisco?” Jesse asks, trotting over to the breach. She looks weirdly focused on him, so Cisco, who's always up for more hugs, holds his arms out, but she completely ignores him. “Dad, give Cisco a hug,” she commands, and steps through the breach.

“Did she just ditch us?” Cisco asks, incredulous. His arms fall limply to his side as Harry approaches since there's obviously no chance of getting a hug from him.

“Looks like it. You'll have to take a rain check on that hug; let's go before your fan club comes looking for you.” Harry claps him on the back before firmly pushing him toward the breach.

“Wait, what fan club? And the hug-” Cisco starts to say, but then they're crossing through to Earth-1 again. They arrive back on the other side to find Caitlin and Jesse already chatting about something Jesse did at the Central City aquarium while away.

“Oh, good, if everyone's back we should get out of here. I really don't like this hallway,” Caitlin says with a shiver.

Cisco needs his glasses again to close the breach, but he gets the feeling that his abilities might be starting to come a little easier. They return to the cortex, the girls still chatting, and Cisco's about to go text Barry, to distract himself from his unsuccessful training session, but Harry crooks his finger, beckoning him over. Reflexively, he scowls as Harry's summoning gestures grow more and more grandiose, but he gives in without a real struggle and shuffles to Harry's corner.

“Is this about my hug? Bring it in. My body is ready,” he says, lifting his arms again, crowding around Harry, who wards him off using his large roll of paper. Cisco is only being so bold because he knows the probability of Harry actually accepting his offer is next to zero.

“No hug. Not today. I've got something else for you.” Harry thrusts the long roll toward him, and Cisco receives it, puzzled. He peers down into the cylinder, but can't make out what the

plans are for. "Go ahead and open it."

At first, his eye catches on the aesthetics of the design, but it only takes a second for him to realize what he's looking at. "Holy Hannah, the magnetization gun! With the conduit installed in the- wait," he turns his gaze back to Harry, in slight disbelief, "These are from your Earth-2 lab. When did you design this?"

"Several years ago, but you'll see it needs some major revisions. I'd forgotten about it until karaoke night when you were trying to tell my thigh how cool it would be." Harry looks amused by the memory, and Cisco clutches at the plans while trying not to remember how shameless he is when drunk. "It actually took me a while to find, until I told Dr. Gutierrez the blueprints were for you, and then suddenly everyone in the lab was bending over backwards to help me. I didn't know how popular you'd become." Harry's tone is light but he looks somewhat put-off.

"Yep, that's me, the coolest kid in school. Prom king material, with no shortage of potential dates, if Jesse's not messing with me," Cisco responds, already distracted again by the designs in his hand. They're a little different from what he'd been imagining, but the general idea matches up pretty closely with what drunk Cisco had been trying to achieve. Sadly, most of the notes he left for himself had been nonsense, and he'd forgotten about the project since then.

Harry makes an odd little noise and when Cisco glances at his face he looks both perplexed and resigned to whatever it is he's just realized. "Jesse told you this, did she?"

"Yeah, I thought she was fishing for help at first, but maybe she was trying to play matchmaker. I'm not sure, but you Wellses really do your best to make a guy feel better about his nonexistent romantic prospects. Thanks," Cisco says, reaching out to kind of paw gratefully at Harry while trying to continue reading the blueprints simultaneously without dropping them.

"She's...not wrong. If you look, you might find more people partial to you than you expect. People interested in dating you," Harry says carefully, taking hold of one end of the papers to help Cisco hold them open.

Cisco can't help his small smile. Is it ironic when the person you're falling for is trying to set you up with someone else? If not ironic, it's certainly indicative of the way the universe enjoys toying with Cisco's life. "Ha, maybe. I don't know if I'm up for looking right now, though. There's just a lot of other stuff going on with us, and I'm," *trying to get over you*, "okay with the way things are." Well, not quite 'okay,' but he can make do. There's no cure for his brand of loneliness, not when Harry stands so close without any idea of the way it causes Cisco's breath to stop short. He already realized a few months ago that he wasn't ready to try a relationship with someone else. Dating anyone would be unkind to them, and unkind to himself.

He can feel Harry watching him for a few long seconds, searching for some sign, but Cisco continues to read the schematics, careful not to give himself away. "I see," Harry says quietly, when he doesn't find what he's looking for. "No longer worried about dying alone?" There's a

swell of happiness that stirs when Cisco notices that Harry cares enough to inquire about his anxieties.

“Did it once and it wasn’t so bad,” Cisco quips, then shivers at the memory of Dr. Wells/Thawne stabbing him through the heart. “Lie. That was a lie. It sucked big time, but it’s not happening again, so I’m good. Anyway, it’s not like I’m really alone. Got all of Team Flash with me, right? Barry, Caitlin, the Wests and Jesse. I’ve even got you, on the days I haven’t duct taped your junk to the ceiling,” he says, smiling up at Harry. That much is true, he knows. Harry wouldn’t make him coffee and help him build a magnetization gun for kicks if they weren’t friends. Harry wouldn’t stay up with him until three a.m. discussing the probability of finding a Mirror Universe Earth à la Star Trek, or toss cheese balls for Cisco to catch with his mouth while complaining about orange residue if he didn’t at least care about him a little.

He wouldn’t have looked so stricken when Cisco vibed over to him that final time to ask desperately for help while flickering out of existence, almost unintelligible in his fervent promise that he would find them again and help fix things as Cisco began unraveling in the time stream.

Harry’s face confirms it. He returns Cisco’s smile, and even the angles of his cheekbones and nose become soft when he looks like this, his natural defenses worn down so that his shoddily hidden affection shines through. Cisco has seen this smile before, at odd, unpredictable times – his reward for being there when Harry is sleepless and unguarded due to their shared exhaustion, or for slotting the final piece of their latest creation in place without anything shorting out on them – and it always strikes him like a gentle push, like the tug of the lifting tide on his sailboat as he floats slowly out to sea. It’s the tenderness that gets him, unfolding like a secret that Cisco’s undergone countless side quests to earn the right to see, and it settles heavy and warm in his chest.

“Yeah. You’ve got me. Even on the days you douse my chair in glitter.” Perhaps it’s the trace of a laugh under the rasp of Harry’s voice, or the heat from his hand so close to overlapping Cisco’s that reveal what a furnace he is under all his dark clothing. Maybe it’s just the combination of those words, like a promise of constancy, combined with that smile, like the arrival of rain after the drought; what should be just another moment tinged with undefined intimacy that he might later look back on wistfully becomes something more. Something much too significant.

It shouldn’t be enough to push Cisco over the edge, a moment as simple as this, but it is.

Plan A has officially failed.

Cisco always thought that when he finally fell in love there would be some great, earthshaking realization, like the shock of too many vibrations coursing through him at once, but it’s a subtle, understated shift. There’s no actual fall, no drop in altitude or plummeting at terminal velocity that seals his fate. Rather, he takes the last step down a long, long stairway that he’s been descending for months now. There have been pitfalls along the way: eroded steps and the absence of a handrail halfway through once he realized he was in too deep, but the journey was never taxing, never as difficult as he might have expected. Just the slow climb down, walking helplessly forward with each surprised laugh, each shared epiphany and

distracted brush of contact between their hands. It wasn't inevitable, not quite, but in retrospect, he thinks he passed the point of no return a long time ago. It could have been at the tail-end of a frantic afternoon spent running repairs and manning the comms with barely a minute to breathe in between, but enough familiarity between them that Cisco knew he could slump against Harry for just a moment to relieve the weariness that he's allowing to seep out into the airwaves. Harry never said a thing, just adjusted his position to better accommodate the curve of Cisco's cheek against his shoulder without complaint even as Cisco's hair tumbled down to tickle at his neck.

Or maybe at the break of dawn the morning after the day they'd spent staked out on the rooftop waiting for the burst of their latest meta's light in the city streets, drinking painfully intense hot cocoa and mapping the differences in their stars. They could rattle off the metrics and mythologies of their favorite constellations ("of course you have a favorite constellation, don't front, Harry."), but their stories began degenerating into increasingly ridiculous yarns spun from sugar and a desire to one-up each other. As sunrise painted the canvas of sky in autumn, Harry finally gave in to his demands and told him one last, true story.

("You have it here on Earth-1 too. The asterism that was there," adjusting Cisco's arm until he was pointing in the right direction, "The endless triangle. There are a few different myths, but the most well-known is of the dragonfly and the mollusk, who fall in love despite being separated by the sea and the sky.")

"You mean Altair and Vega? The weaver and the cowherd? They can only meet once a year, right?" Cisco wasn't sure if he was surprised that Harry likes the most tragically romantic cluster of stars.

Harry frowned, taking his glasses off to clean them on his shirt. Dawn alighted on him like a revelation. "They meet in your world? That's a happy change. Normally they pine away until one of them dies. Usually the dragonfly, while trying to enter the sea."

"Here, they're also people, which might help. Damn, though. Talk about a depressing animal story. Do you earth-2 people hate happiness?"

"I take it you're not a fan of the ending."

"Hell no, it's terrible. Let's just pretend the ocean recedes once a year or something so they can see each other again. Otherwise it's too sad."

Even soaked in the colors of daybreak, Harry's eyes were as piercingly blue as ever. "I never liked the ending either. Too defeatist. They should have searched harder for a solution."

Cisco laughed, shoving him as he sat up, almost knocking their empty mugs over. "Typical Harry. You'd part the sea itself before giving up."

Harry just shrugged, still lying on the roof, still gazing up at Cisco. "Some people are worth parting the sea for.")

Or it could have happened during any of the countless hours they learned to share a space together. Learning how to weave around each other without speaking, and to coordinate their

work without trampling each other's egos and toes. Making contingency plans for their contingency plans, and figuring out the boundaries on how much they could fight before genuinely hurting one another. Trading anecdotes and wrenches and quotations, smearing everything in their (now basically co-owned) workroom with grease and maple syrup and spilled ketchup, and arguing over whose makeshift automated scrubber worked the best. Somewhere along the line, while learning how to live with Harry, perhaps he'd grown too close.

Cisco doesn't know for certain. But it's been a long time coming, and even as he turns dizzy with impending dread, he also feels a sense of peace. Despite all the myriad issues, it doesn't feel wrong to be in love with Harry. The age difference, the universe difference, all the bad old days with Dr. Wells still fresh in his memory, and Harry still acting like a dodgy bastard – it doesn't matter as much as he thought it would. He's already died, or experienced the equivalent about four times, and the little things, and the old selves they've outgrown aren't worth quibbling over. He can accept that he really doesn't mind being in love with Harry, just like he can accept that he needs to move on someday.

He lets his eyes drop closed to preserve this moment in time, and then he opens them again to the sight of Harry, still regarding Cisco softly, everything about him dark and comforting and lovely. Thus begins Plan B.

Deliberately, meticulously, he doesn't react to the overflowing fountain of emotion inside him. Everything is as it ever was. Don't let anyone find out. Conceal, don't feel, just like Frozen taught him. And great, now there are Disney songs stuck in his head.

“You look good in glitter,” he says, feeling nonsensical but trying not to let it show on his face. Gaze flitting back to the papers, he catches a hitch in the plans and begins taking mental notes on what to change, in order to distance himself from thoughts about Harry. His voice betrays nothing as he starts thinking aloud. “Okay, yeah, I can see a few problems already, but we could make a workaround, starting with a different alloy for the barrel here. We should change the shape too; it’s outdated. And the detailing is pretty weird.”

He doesn't realize that he's started to wander out of the cortex until he hears Harry's footsteps alongside his. “The shape is fine. It's the most ergonomic design that allows for all the components we need,” Harry argues, and Cisco takes comfort from the familiarity of it all. He can do this.

“What happened to aesthetics, Harry? It's like the set designer for Tron was put in charge of building shit for Willy Wonka. Would you really want to be seen in public holding this?”

“I never want to be seen in public, period. The aesthetics of the magnetization gun I'm holding doesn't change that.” Harry tugs the blueprints out of his hands and rolls them back into a tube. They walk in unison toward their workroom, and it's as natural as breathing.

“Well, I guess we can just never go anywhere together ever again, because I wouldn't be caught dead within five hundred feet of this thing.” Cisco shakes his head, hair whipping around, as he makes a checklist of every piece he's going to have to change.

“Good thing I have no intention of allowing you to die if you're within five hundred feet from me,” Harry says, his tone firm and his face stern.

“Great, so I'll just have to live with the endless shame of being associated with this monstrosity. You've made me a social pariah. Hester Prynne'd me.”

“Were you born with this knack for hyperbole, or did you pick it up somewhere during your your time at Xavier's School for Gifted Smartasses?”

“One: thank you for your confidence that I could be part of the X-Men. Two: if we're talking unnecessary dramatics, I learned from the best, Mr. Fired-a-gun-whilst-jumping-through-the-air. Do you steal all your moves from 80s action flicks?” Cisco elbows him knowingly. It hasn't become any more difficult to talk to Harry, despite everything. Nothing feels any different, and Cisco isn't sure if that's a blessing or a curse.

“Well, *Casablanca* was deeply influential during the formative years of my life,” Harry replies, the corner of his mouth twitching when he sees the way Cisco double-takes. “You don't have it? Quintessential smash-em-up space western retelling of the famous Greatest War biopic?”

Cisco starts chewing on his thumb while he glares. “I *know* you're fucking with me; I am 96% *sure*, but after seeing that bizarro black and white Shawshank musical, I just can't tell anymore.”

With his mouth pursed in disappointment, Harry tsks at him. “Cisco, *Casablanca* is as beloved to sci-fi fans as *Star Wars*, or *Blade Runner*, or *Let's Go Back to the Future Again*.”

Wait. “Hold up, what was that last one?” But Harry doesn't answer. He just sighs, and speeds ahead into the workroom, leaving Cisco to chase after him.

“I'm taking charge of our next movie night. You're woefully uneducated on Earth-2 cinema,” he says, chucking the paper tube behind him without warning. Cisco scrambles to catch it before it rolls away under a bench.

“Okay, but I'm still the head of the snacks department.” Harry nods minutely, and then they're back to arguing about the gun schematics, even as they start piecing together a part they mutually agree on keeping, and it's so ordinary that Cisco wonders what he was afraid of before.

This isn't so difficult; loving Harry is much the same as unconsciously liking Harry a whole lot, which he's long since grown used to. Nothing has to change between them. If he keeps calm and carries on, it'll be over soon enough. He just needs enough time for his heart to catch up with his brain, and realize that there's no hope in pursuing Harry. He won't be failing Plan B.

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The post-fall world is virtually identical to the pre-fall world. Life continues on. Barry almost gets himself set on fire twice, and bitten by an enemy who manages to outdo King Shark, but

gets a nice haircut for unexpectedly related reasons. Joe has a close call when the CCPD has a run in with a meta who can wreak mudslides, and Caitlin has a rough couple of days patching them all up, made slightly better by Joe's payment of his famous homemade grilled cheese. Cisco makes Iris a special stungun to protect her because she's been investigating a bit too close to danger and starts researching into why both Jesse and Wally have had increased metabolisms recently. Hartley swings by to help one day and strikes up a terrifying friendship with Jesse that Cisco knows he should be wary of. Harry narrowly avoids destroying a public swimming pool, gets a loyalty card at a fro-yo shop, and decides it's his moral duty to backseat game for Cisco when he's playing Fallout to regain credibility after having been demolished in DDR.

Things are good. Even when Cisco forgets himself and lets his eyes linger places they shouldn't, and sits a little too close to Harry when they're ripping all the wires out of their temporary snow machine, things are good. Sometimes, he comes dangerously close to crossing a line, like when Harry tells him for the fourth time to backtrack to a grotto he's already searched, and he's caught between throwing his controller at the wall and pulling this infuriating man down by his collar and kissing his smug, awful, handsome face until he shuts up.

But those are rare occurrences. Rare-ish. Sorta. Okay, they happen often enough that it's distracting, but Cisco has got it under control. More or less.

He's given up on distance. It wasn't possible before, so it won't be possible now, but he can't bring himself to mind. So he's actually begun pining a little bit, but overall, he's at peace. He gets to wake up everyday and go to his awesome job, and see his awesome friends, and help save the city while in the presence of the person he loves. It's not a hard life.

Plan B is...happening. Kind of. Cisco's never really been great at the falling out of love part. Eventually, most of his feelings fade with time, but he'd be lying if he said that thinking about Kendra or Melinda wouldn't still make his heart skip a beat. So he's still getting through, day by day, hoping that he'll get with the program soon, but every casual touch and fleeting smile is kindling to the fire. And maybe that's okay.

As long as it doesn't cause trouble for the team, and as long as nobody knows, there's no inherent harm to him being in love with Harry. Cisco's not the type to become bitter over old flames, so once it's over, it's over, but until then, he'd like to enjoy this while it lasts, both the highs and the lows.

Tonight, he's still up, trying to figure out the best way to protect Barry from being turned to stone, and he's been retreading the same argument with himself for the last two hours, with the occasional interjection from Harry, who's hunched over at a different desk.

Under the blue cast of its light, Cisco's phone screen tells him it's already 2:26 a.m. He hasn't heard a peep out of Harry for at least twenty minutes, which is suspect, so he unfolds from where he was pretzeled on the ground to go investigate. It's no surprise when he finds the other man snoring gently, lumped up awkwardly over the bench and resting his head on one arm. He takes a moment to drink in the sight, resisting the urge to reach out and smooth out the slight furrow in Harry's brow that persists even when the rest of him softens in sleep, but he pivots on his heel and goes to rifle through one of his cabinets until he finds the blanket he

stowed away in secret. Cisco doesn't think he can move Harry to his cot without waking him, so he settles for draping the blanket over Harry's shoulders, tucking in the corners so it doesn't fall to the floor, then returns to his grounded work zone, reconsidering his stance on a mirror function for Barry's suit.

At some point in the night he must fall asleep himself, because the world shifts from his workroom to the cortex in midday, hazy like a memory and his body uncontrollable like he's a puppet. He turns around at the sound of someone entering the room behind him. It's Harry, smiling like- no, it's not him. It's Dr. Wells, looking as kindly as ever (and secretly evil, as the lurch in his stomach reminds him), and beside him is Ronnie, bright and alive, hand in hand with Caitlin, and Cisco's heart is searing at the sight, the sensation a microcosm of the way Dr. Wells' hand tore through his flesh.

"You okay, Cisco?" Ronnie asks, just like he used to, and Cisco feels it with a pang of loss.

"We miss you. Caitlin misses you," he says, the words slipping out unbidden. It's just a dream, he knows, but somehow that only makes it worse.

"I know, and I'm sorry. But we had to try," Ronnie says, except he's not Ronnie anymore, he's Professor Stein, and they're not in the cortex, they're standing outside the lab, watching the singularity devouring the city. Dr. Wells has warped into Iris, supporting Caitlin. Above, Barry is nothing more than a red streak, trying his best to close the singularity alone.

"There's no other choice. We need Firestorm," Hartley says to Cisco's left, and he startles, because he has no recollection of Hartley having been here with the rest of the team, but obviously he had. Except in the timeline when he hadn't. Cisco doesn't know what he's reliving right now, too many conflicting memories of Hartley as friend and foe to sort through, and now someone's calling his name- oh, of course, it's Joe, asking him if he's ready, and he has to be ready, doesn't he? They need to take down Zoom, after all, so he prepares, eyes flickering between Joe and Harry, waiting for Caitlin to start her distraction.

But it's not Caitlin who steps out, it's Iris, and she's not talking to Zoom, she's talking to Eddie, smiling at him, and he smiles back, even as the spot of blood from his bullet wound continues to grow, soaking through his shirt. Barry, exhausted and eyes lined with guilt, is saying something to Cisco and Caitlin; Cisco can only concentrate on half the words, still watching as Eddie's body crumples, falling into Iris' arms.

"I'm sorry, guys...on my own...STAR Labs isn't...keep you safe...okay, Cisco?" Hearing his name brings his attention back to Barry, who looks so small and sad that Cisco wants to wrap him up and hide him somewhere safe, tell him it's not his fault.

"What?" he asks, trying to remember what it was Barry said before he left the lab that day.

"Don't try to stop me," Barry replies, and then he's gone before Cisco can protest. And then Cisco's alone again, in the abandoned wreckage of the lab basement, in his apartment, in the little room he uses at CCPD.

This dream is awful, like the greatest hits of all his bad memories, and Cisco has had enough. He needs to wake up, stat. There's always one memory that does it.

And here he is again, tears streaking his face, Dr. Wells regarding him regretfully as he monologues, and here it comes, that outstretched hand, and his pulse in overdrive because he knows he's going to die, knew it from the minute he stepped into the room...

...but Dr. Wells doesn't reach for his heart. Instead, he claps Cisco on the arm warmly, telling him, "I'll miss you too," and it's not the Reverse-Flash smiling at him fondly like that. It's Harry, who says his name for the final time, and turns away to go home forever. Unlike Barry's, this goodbye is final. Cisco's throat is dry and his hands itchy under his skin; he wants to say something else, before it's too late, but he's already opening up the breach, and-

He jerks awake with a start, his mouth full of copper and his eyelids stuck to his cheek. He tries to roll out of bed, but then he remembers he's not in his bed, he's on the floor of the shop, surrounded by the broken pieces of the radio he was working on. Shit. He must have had another episode, and sure enough, here come Dante's thundering footsteps as he tears through the door.

"What happened? Are you okay? You're bleeding, can you sit up? Stay here, mom is getting help," Dante tells him in rapid-fire Spanish, hands trembling as he helps Cisco up. "Shit, your nose, do you have any tissues?"

"On my desk, over there. I'll do it; don't get blood all over your hands." Dante helps prop him up against his bench as Cisco staunches the flow of blood from his nose, still feeling woozy, a headache already coming on.

"What was it? Are you having the hallucinations again? I knew you should've stayed in the hospital-"

"And do what, lie around and wait until I die? I'm fine, everything's fine," Cisco says, even though his head is pounding. "It wasn't that painful this time, I just had a bad fall off the bench."

"A bad fall wouldn't cause a nosebleed, Cisco," Dante says, looking tired through and through, and Cisco sighs, because it isn't bad enough that his stupid issues fuck up his brain and his heart, but his family's lives as well.

"I promise it looks worse than it is. Look, the bleeding's almost done. No hallucinations this time," he lies, by now having perfected the face needed to sell his story.

"Okay, but the ambulance is already on its way, and I know you have a migraine- don't give me that look, it's obvious from your face. Please go, or mom's going to spend the rest of the day worrying." Cisco groans because he knows it's true; every time she comes by she's wringing her hands, the lines in her face deepening from stress. She's probably been crying. He always makes her cry.

The ambulance pulls up to the front of the shop eight minutes later, and Cisco hobbles in, supported by Dante, who starts telling the paramedic the details. He lies down and answers all the questions perfunctorily, all too used to this routine. His head still hurts, so he lets his eyes drift closed during the ride, Dante by his side talking in hushed tones to their mother over the phone.

He tries to piece together the images he saw this time, but there's nothing new, just the twisted rehashing of things he's seen before. There's a profound ache in his chest, and for a moment he's concerned his heart might be flipping out on him again, but he thinks it must be that same painful longing he feels from time to time for these people that he'll never get to meet. An indescribable mix of homesickness, affection, and bitterness tied up in a dreamlike nostalgia.

He wonders if any of them live in Central City, or if any of them even still exist. At least he has Hartley, still prickly and condescending like in his fake memories, but *real*. Real and whole and sometimes nice enough that Cisco can consider him a friend on certain days of the week. And at least he knows Dr. Harrison Wells exists, even if the way he acts on TV is nothing like either of the Harrison Wellses that Cisco has memories of. It's probably for the best that they'll never meet. His feelings surrounding that man (or men, as it may be) are too confusing already to bring real life into it. Maybe it's for the best that he'll never meet anyone else. He doesn't know what he would say, anyway.

"Cisco, don't fall asleep," Dante says, shaking his shoulder carefully. "We're almost there."

"Yeah, I'm awake, I'm awake," he responds, but his vision suddenly goes black as pressure builds behind his eyes. It returns, unfocused and gray at the edges, but there's the wet scent of iron in the air again, and Cisco knows he must be bleeding.

The paramedic is at his side in a flash, and the thought of that phrase makes him laugh (how crazy would it be if he ran into Barry one of these days, just through happenstance?) until he starts coughing, and the smell of blood becomes thicker, filling up the whole space. The ambulance hits a bump, sending him bouncing upward. Someone's saying something- it's the paramedic, the one who isn't Barry, but so's Dante, asking him what's wrong, but hell if Cisco knows. His body's probably just trying to die again.

"It's fine, I told you, bro. It'll end soon," he slurs, trying to reassure his brother, though perhaps that was a poor choice of words. "'s just blood."

"Wake up," is all Dante says.

"I told you 'm already awake," Cisco mumbles around the paramedic trying to check his vitals.

"Cisco, English. You know I can't speak Spanish," Dante says, voice low and pressing like he's trying to say something important. He's hovering closer, almost getting in the paramedic's space.

"That's a weird lie. Sit back; you're in his way. And I'm still covered in blood, so, you're gonna want to watch out," he gets out between coughs.

But Dante isn't deterred. "That's still Spanish. You need to wake up."

And now the paramedic's getting in on it too. "Wake up, Cisco, it isn't real. You're in a dream," he says, something familiar about the way he speaks, even though they've never met before. "Listen to my voice," he commands, hand clutching Cisco's shoulder so firmly it's

starting to hurt. It's odd to hear that voice coming from that young face, with his sandy blond hair and dark eyes. "I'm real; nothing else is. Whatever it is you see isn't happening here or now. Listen to me, and come back home."

Why does he sound so familiar? Cisco shakes his head, attempting to resist whatever insanity's taken hold of everybody else in the ambulance, and concentrate on why he can't let that voice go. He thinks about the visions from earlier, during his attack, trying to pinpoint when exactly he last heard it.

It comes to him while the paramedic starts shaking him saying, "Dammit, Cisco, get up before I throw you under the emergency shower." *Ah*, right. It's Harry. Now that he remembers, he latches onto that knowledge, following that frequency back home as he opens his eyes.

He returns to consciousness with a gasp, lungs burning from all the coughing, but no blood on his tongue. The first thing he sees is the dimly lit ceiling of his workshop, not the sterile white roof of the ambulance, and he knows he's gotten his worlds and timelines jumbled up again. Harry pops into view, blanket still hanging from his shoulders like a cape, looking wild-eyed with even crazier hair than normal.

"That's it. That's why the paramedic was all wrong, because he looked nothing like you. But is this another hallucination? A memory?" Cisco asks, reaching out and groaning because he slept or fell in a weird way and now his arm is numb.

"Still Spanish," Harry says, and Cisco frowns because he hadn't even noticed.

"Sorry, my bad. This is English now, right? And we're in the present? In a lab, not the hospital or the ambulance?"

"Yes. What happened." It's half a question of concern and half a demand for answers. It's only now that Cisco notices that Harry's hand is still clamped around his shoulder, but in less of a steel grip than before.

"I think I incepted myself? Damn." He doesn't have a headache, but he still feels hazy at the ends, unsure of what reality he's in. "Are you real? Are we in the current timeline?"

"This isn't a dream, and you haven't brought me into a vibe, if that's what you're asking. It's February 19th, 2017, your name is Cisco Ramon, and you work as an engineer at STAR Labs, helping the Flash in secret." Harry pinches the soft spot in the crook of Cisco's elbow and a dull pain follows. "Real enough?"

"Yeah." Cisco sits up so Harry's no longer hovering over his prone body. "Real enough. Blanket, please," he asks, tugging at the cloth. Harry slides over so they're sitting next to one another and rearranges the blanket so that it falls over both their backs. This is real life, Cisco tells himself. He's not dying, not on the brink of a mental breakdown, he's just here in the lab where he ought to be.

"What were you vibing? You were having a hell of a coughing fit, but you wouldn't wake up. And kept responding to me in Spanish."

“No vibes, just trying out my language immersion program on you. Not very successful, huh?”

“Cisco. What happened,” Harry repeats, even more of a demand this time, but under his glower he looks genuinely concerned, and Cisco has to give in.

“I was vibing the B1 timeline. Reliving it, basically. It started out like a normal dream, just some old memories, but they turned out to be a vibe that B1 me was having, but then B1 me was just another vibe that regular me was having. Vibes within vibes, sheesh. Hate it when that happens.”

Harry files the information away, clearly brimming with questions, but he starts with an easy one. “B1?”

“Oh, that’s what I call the alternate timeline that Barry made, the one you helped fix. Named it after him, actually, since he’s the one who made it.”

“And how often does this happen? Vibing the B1 timeline?”

Cisco suspects Harry won’t like the answer no matter what it is, since he hasn’t brought it up to anyone since the vibes began, which was right after returning to their proper timeline. “It’s pretty infrequent. Once or twice every couple of months, and only in dreams. I try not to think about that life too much, so I guess it all channels into my subconscious, but what can you do. That’s the price I pay for these cool powers that I can barely control. Shit’s awesome.” He tries to send a vibrational blast at the crumpled ball of paper on the ground to make himself feel better, but he can only feel the slightest shudder in the air. The ball barely moves at all.

Harry kicks the paper ball away, but whether it’s on his behalf or Cisco’s is unclear. “Is it always like this – do you always have trouble differentiating between the vibes and reality when you wake up? More importantly, do you usually have trouble waking up?”

“It depends on what the vibe was about. If B1 me was remembering some of my original memories, the line gets a little fuzzy,” Cisco says, trying not to think about the really confusing conversation he had with Barry once after waking up groggy and confused.

“Waking up can be hard, but usually if I’m stressed enough it works. Thinking about getting murdered usually does the trick. You’d think I’d be numb to it by now, but *goddamn* does it still get my heart pumping. In a bad way.”

“I’m sorry,” Harry says, his voice strained.

Cisco shrugs. “What for? Not like you did it. I definitely don’t confuse you guys anymore.”

“But I took advantage of it. I used your trauma against you because I could,” Harry spits, a crawling disgust with himself lacing his words. “I would do *anything* for Jesse, but there are some things I did to you and the team that I know weren’t necessary. I was cruel. To you, especially, and I’m sorry for that.”

It's been long enough that the early days of their relationship are mostly forgotten now, but it's still nice to have Harry acknowledge his faults. He knows their initial dislike had been mutual, but it had faded once Harry learned to stop being a total dick all the time, and Cisco had stopped...doing whatever it was that offended Harry. It's probably more like Team Flash taught Harry the power of friendship, but in any case, they're good now.

Cisco ruffles up his own hair, tugging at some tangled strands, and smiles faintly at his companion. "Thanks. That does make me feel better, even if the memory doesn't hurt as much as it use to. I'm mostly- well, I don't know if I'll ever get over it, but it happened already and that's that. No use dwelling. It only comes up in dreams anymore."

"But it's changed the way you move. Obviously, I have no evidence from before, but I'd hazard a guess that you didn't use to be so protective of your heart." He reaches out slowly toward Cisco's chest, and Cisco doesn't flinch, but perhaps only because he knows he's safe right now, and Harry's giving him enough warning that his instincts don't act up. He doesn't move as Harry curls his hand into a loose fist and knocks three times, gently, right above where Cisco's heart lies.

"Testing to see if I'm hollow inside?" Cisco asks, amused at the odd gesture.

"Testing to see if you have enough armor. One day, you might stop flinching, but until then, I want to be sure you're protecting yourself. Someone else might use this trauma against you like I did. You're still too vulnerable."

Harry's eyes are beseeching as he speaks, his uncurled hand still hovering near Cisco's chest, and over the course of the next few seconds, it feels like the vibration of everything around them has slowed. If this were a movie, it would be at this moment that Cisco's self-control would grow weak enough for him to lean in, consequences be damned, acting on hope alone. But he knows the difference between fiction and reality all too well, so he shakes his head, the motion disrupting the stillness in the air, causing Harry to retract his hand.

Harry's really become too kind these days. It's taking its toll on Cisco's restraint.

"Don't worry, I've learned how to take care of myself a long time ago. Besides, I've got a superhero for a best friend. Barry's got my back. Or my front, whatever." That should be enough reason for Harry to stop worrying.

But it seems to have had the opposite effect, from the way Harry's frown returns, settling in like it never left. "Barry's the reason you just woke up hacking your lungs out with no grasp of reality."

At this, Cisco winces minutely, because he knows it's true. "It's not his fault that my powers fuck me over. It's not on him if my brain likes to relive my bad memories," he protests.

"But it *is* his fault that you have those memories at all. You and I both know that."

"He didn't mean for that to happen, c'mon."

“But he should have known better, after what happened when Thawne was here. I understand the lengths he's willing to go to in order to save his mother, and I know, considering Jesse, that I have no room to lecture him, but he *knew*. He saw what happened last time, and he knew *exactly* what changing the timeline would do to you, not to mention to everyone else he cares about, and he went through with it anyway. You could have *died* – you very likely would have, given a few more months in that timeline; I remember what state you were in when we met again, what your Earth had changed into. If you hadn't vibed right before – if we hadn't opened a breach back up-”

The same hand that had been holding Cisco's arm when he woke, that had been tethering him to this Earth, this reality, is now clenched around Harry's knee, turning red at the knuckles. His sentences have become disjointed, breaking off in fragments, which only happens when he's truly stressed. Cisco can't remember him sounding this distraught since they got Jesse back, but then he recalls Harry is one of the few people who's seen firsthand what B1 Cisco was like. Harry's one of the only ones who understands exactly what toll Barry's decision took on him, and Cisco is simultaneously relieved that someone gets it, and exhausted from the need to justify again, to himself and to the world, why he chose to forgive his best friend.

He closes his eyes for just a moment and swallows, his tongue thick against his palate. “He didn't mean to,” he tells Harry again. “He just...he was grieving. His dad literally died just days before, and it's- look, I'm not going to say it didn't hurt, and that it didn't royally suck, because it did, okay? Besides being murdered, which I still rank as the worst experience of all time, brain hemorrhages and heart attacks are pretty high on my list of awful bullshit I'm sick of suffering through. Not to mention the part where I thought I was losing my mind.

“It was pretty fucking awful, but it's not like I don't understand why it happened, you know? Both of his parents were dead, he knew he could fix it, and in that position, I might have made the same decision too. It's not like I can blame him for forgetting about me; he's got so much to deal with, I can't expect him to remember my stupid dimensional issues, right?”

There's real anger in Harry's voice now when he speaks, and it ripples off him in turbulent waves, straining the space between them. “Why not? After *everything* that you do for him, you still think it's too much for him to remember this one vitally important thing about you? Is it really so much to ask him to take your *potential death* into account before he makes idiotic decisions?”

Cisco shakes his head, curling up smaller into his blanket. Everything that Harry says is something he's thought to himself before, but for the sake of the team, and for the city, he's taught himself to let it go. There are greater battles to fight than this, and he's been through worse before and come through stronger for it. This is just another one of those times. “Grief makes people do dumb things. We all know how that goes, and I know he's genuinely sorry about it, so. It's okay. I'm used to it by now.”

The anger drains out of Harry in a flood, leaving behind someone who looks as tired as Cisco feels. He's close to subdued when he looks Cisco in the eye, to tell him, “It's not okay. It's not okay what he did to you and your friends and your Earth, and it's not okay that you had to take it all in stride, and pretend like none of it left a mark on you. It's not my place to forgive

Barry or not, but I do have the right to tell you, even if you don't want to hear it from me, that you deserve better than this.”

It hurts, in a way, to have someone acknowledge the difficulties he's faced, the pain and the trouble and the trauma that he's packed away because there will never be a convenient time to have PTSD when you're saving the world. It hurts because he'd thought he had become an expert by now in burying his issues somewhere they can't get in the way, but they wouldn't be issues, he supposes, if they weren't messy and inescapable. But even as it hurts, there's a sense of ease that comes along with having someone who sees his problems spilling out and sticks up for him anyway. Something in his bones unsticks; a tension in his muscles lets up because at least he isn't carrying it all alone anymore.

“I know I do, but everyone has to make sacrifices, right?” he says, his tone coming out more watery than he'd like. “99% of the time, I'm fine. My B1 life doesn't affect me. And the other 1%...it's not like anyone else would understand even if I explained – they wouldn't *get* it, not really, since none of it was real to them – so why burden them with the knowledge? It's just easier for me, and for the team, to pretend it's all in the past. We've moved forward, everything's good again. So sometimes I have a bad dream. What else is new?”

He's seen frustration on Harry's face before. Become well-acquainted with it, actually, but it's never seemed quite so sad as it does now. “It was real to me,” Harry finally says, looking away from him to the far end of the room, at a tangle of wires and tape. “There are some things I think I remember even more clearly than you do. Which means,” and he turns back to Cisco, face set stubbornly like he's just now made up his mind on something, “that the next time this happens, you should tell me. Call me, text me, whatever. If you need help finding your way back to reality, let me know.” He places his hand at Cisco's shoulder, deliberately gentle, just the comforting reminder of touch to say that he's not alone.

There's a stab of hurt again, but it's a different kind. This time, it tugs at his heart, a yearning sadness and the warm pull of gratitude rolled into one. He's grown so accustomed to keeping his ghosts at bay on his own that it feels like a shock to his system that someone would reach out to him in the dark.

“Even on weekends and holidays?”

“Do I look like I take a day off on your Earth-1 holidays? Of course you should call.”

“Even if it's at five in the morning?” Cisco asks quietly, trying not to hope for too much.

“Especially if it's five in the morning. Any time you vibe your B1 life, any time you forget who you are. I'll understand. After all, I'm one of the few people who knows both of you.”

Cisco's instinct is to turn the offer down, to claim that he'll be okay, but Harry is often obstinate over less important matters, and in the end, despite it all, he *does* want someone he can lean on. And it's true that only Harry, Jesse, and Barry have any recollection of his other life, so who better to trust? He musters the best smile he can manage right now, and nods his consent.

“Next time, then. If I find myself slipping again, I'll tell you.”

“Good.” Harry smiles faintly back at him, still a bit sad at the edges, and Cisco can't help the swoop of melancholy he feels inside at the sight. Tonight's conversation, while cathartic, is too heavy to continue any longer, so he does what he does best: try to lighten up the situation.

“You might come to regret it, though. Sure, it'll start with B1 stuff, but now that you've given me the okay to text you, I'm gonna do it all the time.”

“It's a price I'll have to learn to pay,” Harry says dryly, finally withdrawing his hand. “As long as you don't expect me to use emoticons.”

Cisco lets out a small laugh as he tucks the blanket under his feet. “No, but I really think you'd take well to snapchat, actually? I'll download it for you later.” Harry raises an eyebrow, looking dubious, and Cisco puts his hands up hastily, trying to explain. “Don't tell me you wouldn't be all about snarking at me over disjointed ten second video clips and cryptic photos of shit around the lab.”

“We'll see. I don't want you to think I've given you carte blanche to tinker with my phone.”

“Oh, please, as if you haven't already jailbroken it yourself. I'm just gonna set you up with a couple of useful apps, like the metahuman not-Tinder, and maybe a game or two.”

“One app. You can download one.”

“How about three?” Cisco holds up three fingers and bats his eyes hopefully.

Harry stares him down, unmoved, so he stops batting his eyelids like a cartoon character and leans in instead, keeping his eyes wide and guileless, tilting his head just so. He knows the technique works on Iris, who will fold like soggy cardboard the second he starts to pout. At first, Harry seems impervious, but Cisco persists, allowing his mouth to turn down slightly at the corners. If anything, it seems to make Harry more disgruntled, but in the end he rolls his eyes, and concedes. “Two.”

“Wow, I can't believe you gave in,” Cisco gloats. “You're not even bothering to pretend you're not soft anymore.”

“Soft?” Harry scoffs. “I'll show you soft.” With a good yank, he strips the blanket from Cisco's shoulders, sweeping it around so that he alone is completely enveloped under it.

“Ooh, I sure just got schooled. But I should be getting home anyway, to get some sleep in my actual bed for once. Tell Barry I'm taking the morning off: I'm sleeping in today.” Cisco stands, stretching out the kinks in his back before going to gather his hoodie and car keys.

Harry, still partially wrapped like a burrito, follows him like a wraith; it's weirdly cute, seeing him traipsing around tangled up in a cotton blanket. “Is that really a good idea? What if you vibe again?”

Cisco, now zipped up and ready to go, resists the desire to reach out and smooth down that wild hair and kiss away the worry lines creasing around Harry's eyes. He's suddenly glad that

he's already fallen for Harry, because he'd probably be having a really untimely freak out after tonight if he hadn't.

Luckily, he only decides to run his mouth instead of taking drastic action. "Then I'll call you, like I promised. You know, you shouldn't keep being so nice to me. I might start getting expectations," he teases, as he heads to the workroom door.

"Maybe that was my intention all along," Harry replies, and Cisco barely manages not to trip on a box on his way out when he hears that. Maybe he's just filtering this conversation through his own hopeful wishes, but in this context, the response sounds almost like it could be flirtatious.

But this isn't a game he's willing to play with himself today. "Nefarious," he says, beginning down the hallway. "Don't tell me you've been sitting on a long con this whole time."

"You'll just have to wait and see."

Harry walks him out to the parking lot, all the way to his car, and Cisco opens up the door, about to step in, but he pauses at the sight of Harry standing a few feet away, waiting for him to drive off. Under the parking lot lights, it strikes Cisco suddenly that he's looking at one of Earth-2's most successful men wearing rumpled, day-old clothes and a Spider-Man print blanket, his glasses deserted somewhere back in the lab and his face worn from sleepiness and worry. Hanging out in a parking lot hours before the city wakes just so he can see Cisco off safely, and though Cisco loves him all the more for it, he's hit with the sinking understanding that he isn't sure this is the best place for Harry. He had been so pleased to see him again that he'd accepted Harry's return without much consideration into whether it was a good idea, but now Cisco has to wonder, doesn't he miss his old life? He thinks Earth-1 has been good for both members of the Wells family, but he's been biased from the start.

Releasing the handle to the car door, he backtracks a few steps, until Harry can hear him when he asks, "Are you happy here?"

Harry squints at him, befuddled by the sudden question and his lack of departure. "Here? In the parking lot?"

Cisco cracks a grin at his charmingly confused face before trying to explain himself. "No, here, on Earth-1, with us. You *seem* happy, but I don't know what you were like back home, and I just hope- I don't want you to think you have to stay with us out of some sort of obligation."

"Is this your way of saying you're sick of me?" Harry asks, stepping in to loom over Cisco for the first time in a long while.

"No! I'd tell you to your face if I were sick of you. I just wanted to be sure you wouldn't regret staying here. You'll always be one of us, but if we're holding you back, I don't want you to stick around just on our account. You gotta do you." He smacks Harry lightly on the arm with the back of his hand.

The blanket has begun slipping off of Harry's shoulders like an unwieldy toga, but he doesn't notice. "I wouldn't have stayed I didn't want to. Right now, I can do more good here with you than I can for the people of my Central City. Someday I might return, but there's more here for me now than there is back there. You can't get rid of me so easily." He continues to hover, but Cisco just smiles and hikes the blanket back up so that it stops drooping on the ground.

"I'm thinking I should work harder, actually, to make sure you never want to leave. I need someone to blame when my cookies get burnt. And someone to keep thrashing in rhythm and music games. There's something really satisfying about watching you flail around."

"Flail? I don't flail, Ramon. I'm as good at dancing as I am at particle physics."

"Pretty big boast for a guy who can't tell his up and left arrows apart."

"I'm talking actual dancing, not high-speed, strategic foot-stomping."

"Guess you'll just have prove it on the dancefloor. Throwdown at the hoedown!" Cisco puts a little shimmy in his step to show he won't be outdone, and Harry snorts and grabs him by the shoulders to spin him around.

"You really want to settle this now? What happened to sleeping in?" It's spoken like a question but Harry has already marched him back to his car door.

Cisco nods gamely. "You, sir, make a very good point. Sleeping in takes precedence today. Goodnight, Harry." He slides into the driver's seat and closes the door behind him, wiggling his fingers at Harry through the glass. In return, Harry raps against the window twice: a send-off. Cisco nods once more, then slowly pulls away, heading out into the night.

His apartment is cold when he crawls into bed, so he drapes another quilt over to keep warm in the winter air, glad that the heating in STAR Labs works properly, so Jesse and Harry won't freeze. Sleep comes easy, welcoming him back with a familiar embrace, but there are no vibes this time, just silly dreams about being in a band with Joe and taking a long boat ride down a river with Caitlin.

When he wakes, there's no confusion. It's still February 19, 2017 and he's still Cisco Ramon, engineer at STAR Labs and secret member of Team Flash. His heart is slightly cracked, his brain a little bent, and he's still hopelessly in love with someone he can't have, but it's okay.

He's in the right timeline and things are good.

--

"He's glaring at me again!" Barry hisses as he sidles past Cisco. "Is this because of yesterday?"

Cisco spares a glance over at Harry, who is indeed glaring at Barry while discussing something with Caitlin. With a sigh, he pats Barry on the back. "Probably. I'll go talk to him about it."

Yesterday was the first time Cisco needed extra help coming back to reality after waking up in an apartment he only had hazy memories of. He had been confused by the lack of IV drip or hospital gown, and even more confused when neither a doctor nor his parents wandered in after a few minutes. He was certain it was just another hallucination, so he lay there, waiting to see what would happen, but none of his dream friends appeared. Finally, he decided to look around, to see if the situation would become clearer, and found a slip of paper (ripped out of a novelty Starfleet notebook) sitting by the bedside, with a note in his own handwriting. *Not sure who or where you are? Call Harry. Phone passcode should be what you expect.*

Feeling like he was living out a scene from *Memento*, he managed to unlock his phone and find “Harry,” who picked up on the third ring.

Harry – whose voice brought forth the image of the strange Dr. Wells and a certain level of both exasperation and comfort – calmly talked him through what was happening, but when it didn't seem to be enough, told Cisco that he would send Barry over to help him remember himself. Harry had stayed on the phone with him until the knock on his front door five minutes later. Cisco stumbled out of his bedroom, winding around stacks of books and DVDs, and a half-deconstructed laptop and opened the door to the superhero he remembered from his visions.

Barry, looking frazzled with concern, grabbed him by the arms. “Harry sent me to check up on you? Are you okay? Did something happen?” he asked, but Cisco was too busy going slack-jawed from the vibe he was thrown into to answer. It was a simple scene, just Barry standing next to Wally on the treadmill, but the sight of STAR Labs, of Caitlin and Joe watching Wally start to run, was enough to jog Cisco's other memories into place. Slowly, his certainty that he was in the wrong place and the wrong time faded, as the familiarity of his apartment returned.

“Cisco? What'd you vibe? Do you need to sit down?” Barry was still bombarding him with questions, holding him up, and Cisco stared at him for a moment, just to memorize his face again, before grinning back crookedly.

“I'll tell you about it later. I'm okay; I was just having some bad vibes in my sleep – needed you to get me grounded again. Hey, while you're here, wanna give me a lift to work?” Cisco asked, shooting at Barry with finger guns.

Barry frowned a bit, refusing to unlatch from Cisco's arm. “You know you can call me too, right? If you have problems like this?”

Cisco nodded back, not yet willing to explain the situation. It would just be too complicated. “I know, bud, I do. But it was easier to tell Harry, since he already knew what was going on. Anyway, I'm gonna change; see you in a few. Don't eat all my bread.”

When they arrived at the lab, Harry cornered him, trying to read his face for signs of recognition.

“Don't worry, I know who you are. Vibed Barry and my brain sorted itself out,” Cisco told him, and related back the entirety of the morning so that they would have more data for the

next time it happened. It was the first time that talking to Harry hadn't been enough, so they needed to understand why. That had been that, until Harry realized that Barry still had no idea what happened that morning. At first, he started off glaring at Cisco, but then Barry ran in and scattered all the papers in the room and drew Harry's ire for the rest of the day.

Today Cisco's been on his best behavior, to avoid giving Harry any reason to confront him, so Barry's still been the sole victim of the Scary Wells Glare™. Cisco was hoping it would resolve itself, but from the looks of things, he'll have to deal with it himself.

While Barry and Caitlin are busy, Cisco draws Harry aside to talk in the hallway. "So, how's things? You seem tense this morning. Have you considered treating yourself to a nice massage at the local spa? You and Jesse can go together for a fun family excursion."

"I'm not paying strangers to give me a massage," Harry says irritably.

"Wait, so would you pay me? I've got nimble fingers. And could use some extra cash. That ice cream shack by the CCPD is breaking my wallet." He creeps his hands forward, only for them to be pushed away.

"All of that is besides the point. Barry still doesn't know about your B1 vibes. You didn't tell him," Harry accuses.

"I did not," Cisco agrees. "Didn't think it was the right time to spring it on him."

Harry sighs, dragging a hand through his hair in annoyance. "Will it ever be the right time? What if this happens again? Talking to me wasn't good enough; you needed to vibe someone, and Barry's obviously the fastest option. Put your own needs first for once. Let him help fix the mess he caused. These people care about you; give them the chance to prove it."

"Is it that big a deal? It just doesn't seem like I need to bother anyone else about this," Cisco hedges, but Harry holds up a hand to stop him.

"Think about it this way then. Do you really want to wait until you become a liability for him to find out?"

Harry has a good point. Knowing himself, if he didn't get answers soon enough, Cisco would have wandered back to his B1 home or to his B1 shop, and totally freaked out some random strangers. But still, he's reluctant to talk about this after so long. Harry doesn't look like he's going to back down, though.

"Ugh, okay. That's a fair point. But. If I'm gonna explain it, you're coming along for emotional support. Let's do lunch."

"You're barking up the wrong tree. I neither do lunch nor provide emotional support."

Cisco rolls his eyes, and tows Harry back to the cortex. "What's the point in telling lies that I already have definitive proof against?"

So they do lunch, the four of them.

Caitlin had been excited to hear Harry was joining them for once, but when they wind up at Big Belly Burger her enthusiasm dissipates a bit.

“I thought the point of going out was to try something new together. Like the bistro over on Adams and Poplar.” She frowns at Cisco, who hands her yet another tiny cup of ketchup. She places it in line, after seven of its brethren.

“For you and me, you would be absolutely right. But today is more of a...let's say that this is a lunch with ulterior motives. Wait, that sounds bad. I just want to tell you guys something, and I thought it'd be less awkward at a fast food joint.” He finishes pumping the last two cups, and goes to grab a fistful of napkins.

“Oh, okay then,” Caitlin says, followed by an “Oh! Oh my god. Is this. Are you-” She spins to look at the other two, milling about near the counter, waiting for their food, and back at Cisco, who is gathering straws. “Did you bring us here to tell us you're dating?!” she whispers frantically, crowding against him to block them from view.

Cisco wrinkles his nose at her and tucks a straw behind her ear, jabbing it right into her hair. “No, dude, where did you even get that from?”

She widens her eyes and scrunches her eyebrows together meaningfully, then makes a jerky motion toward their companions with her elbow. “Ahem.”

“One of them told you I was dating someone? That's weird.” He turns to try and figure out which one is the more likely culprit, but Caitlin spirits him away to a table.

“No! Cisco. Stop messing around. You and Harry. Are you dating him. Is that what this lunch is about.” Her questions lose inflection and become staccato just as Cisco's heart begins to do the same.

“What? *No*. Why would this lunch ever be about that? That makes negative sense.” He tries to brush it off coolly, but he's pretty sure he sounds more incriminating than anything.

Caitlin flattens her mouth and does this thing with her face that screams disapproval that Cisco wishes he could pull off. “Which question were you answering? No, you're not dating him, or no, that's not what this lunch is about?”

“Both! It was a multipurpose no. All my no's are full of depth that way. Dating. Where'd you even get that idea from?” He hopes it's not because he's too obvious in his affection. He's gotten more lax in his defenses lately.

She shakes her head and plucks the straw from her hair to gesture vaguely at his face with it. “I know you. I recognize the way you look at people when they're...*more* to you than what you show on the surface.” Fuck. She's right; Caitlin's always been able to read him when it comes to his feelings about other people.

“So? You're ‘more’ to me. You might be the most, even.” It's meant to distract her, sure, but it's no less true for it. Caitlin has been the truest core of his family for years now; he loves her as a friend, a colleague, a sister.

Her mouth quirks into a little smile, an understated radiance. “But it's different, you know that.” She pulls the straw wrapper free, ties one end on his pinky and the other end on hers, giving a gentle tug. “You love me as much as I love you, but you don't look at Harry the same way you look at me. And he doesn't look at *anyone* the way he looks at you. Like he's always trying not to smile when you're around. It's cute.”

“You're imagining things,” he denies weakly, and she tugs harder on the straw wrapper knotted between them.

“I'm definitely not. You two are like puzzle pieces. Like magnets. Really stubborn magnets. But sooner or later, you'll give into the attraction. I'm positive about it.”

He's got more denials prepared, but his eye catches on Barry's lanky form headed over holding a tray laden with burgers, and mutters at her, “This might be the only time in your life you've ever been this wrong, but I'll finish this conversation with you another time.”

“Fine,” she responds primly, as Barry slides into the seat next to her.

“New fashion statement?” Barry asks with a grin, pointing at their wrapper tie.

“No, this is a destiny knot. It means that if either of us give away each other's *very important secrets* we will be cursed with bad luck forever,” Cisco tells him, while trying to stare into Caitlin's soul.

She blinks back at him, looking disingenuously sweet. “Oh, is that what this is? I guess I better keep those very important secrets to myself, then. Sorry, Barry.”

“I can't tell if I'm missing out or not,” Barry pouts. Harry arrives with their other tray as he finishes distributing their food and sits down next to Cisco, who immediately snatches up his chocolate shake.

He knows what the purpose of lunch is, but he doesn't wanna just jump right into the whole messy story, so he puts it off for a bit, until they're mostly finished eating. Barry's in the middle of a tale about something odd (but not meta odd) he and Joe found on a case the other day when Harry kicks Cisco in the ankle. Instinctively he elbows back, which causes Harry to drop his sleeve of fries. Harry becomes preoccupied with putting the stray fries back in their container, but by the time Barry's finished speaking, he's kicking Cisco again.

Cisco tries out a subtle “not now” gesture, which becomes a lot less subtle when Harry blatantly points at the other two, his mouth drawn into a stern line. So Cisco goes with a palm up for “wait,” to which Harry responds with a twirling hand for “hurry the hell up”. Cisco makes one last-ditch effort by shoving the remains of his shake into Harry's noisy hands, meaning “drink this and stop bothering me for a second, I'm getting to it, jeez.” Harry does take the bait, but it doesn't mollify him. Instead, he takes a long sip while continuing to scowl at Cisco, his eyes saying enough: “start talking before I do something drastic.”

“Is this a private conversation? Do you need us to look away, give you guys a little space?” Barry asks, eating one of the fallen fries he pilfered from Harry. Caitlin snickers into her

water, then pretends she's really thirsty and starts chugging the rest. Harry continues violently drinking his shake like he hadn't just devoured two burgers and Cisco's onion rings.

Cisco is so done with all these people, honestly. "Ha, no, actually this is a conversation that you guys are very much a part of. Or will be, soon. When I tell you what's happening. In a minute." Crap, he really should just do it, to get it over with, but it's just so...troublesome. Embarrassing, almost. His powers are as much a hindrance as help on most days, and this B1 bullshit doesn't skew those odds in Cisco's favor.

He hates being a burden to the team, to Barry, but if he continues hiding this, it'll probably get worse, not better. He can't only rely on Harry to help him, not after yesterday, when his voice wasn't enough to bring Cisco back from the void.

His indecision is easy to read, and Barry stops munching fries for long enough to ask him, the same concern from yesterday coloring his words again, "Cisco? What is it? Is something wrong? Tell me what it is; I'll take care of it for you."

It's such a Barry thing to say: to commit himself to dispatching the problem without even knowing what it is, that Cisco's heart swells with fondness. That's his best friend, always the hero.

He needs to tell them. He needs their help. But still, he hesitates one more time, looking up at Harry for guidance.

"It's your decision to make," Harry says. "You already know what I think."

Put yourself first for once. Okay. Cisco takes a steadying breath, just to gather himself, to get a feel for the frequencies of the room, of Caitlin and Barry, and he starts talking.

"Recently, I've been having these dreams. Well, they're not really dreams, so much as vibes, and I guess I should really start at the beginning. When Barry changed the timeline, things got kind of rough for me in my new life..."

Barry already knows some stuff about B1 Cisco, but not all the details. Cisco gives them the basic rundown: the hallucinations/vibes of his alternate life started shortly after his eighth birthday and all the physical symptoms that followed changed the trajectory of his entire life. He paints a picture in broad strokes, just so they get an understanding of what it had been like.

The first change, that stands out starkest in his mind is with his parents, who couldn't help but worry about him and all his constant medical issues from imminent brain and heart explosion. Dante had also been a constant source of support. It'd been nice, in some twisted way, to know that there *are* circumstances under which they care about him.

The rest had been kind of awful. He spent more time with doctors and psychiatrists than he did with any friends. College was out of the question, since he was so frail and prone to being re-hospitalized at any time, so he never became an engineer, never got to work at the STAR Labs that alt-Harrison Wells built with his wife. He never got the chance to meet Caitlin or Ronnie, or build any of the machines he knew he was smart enough to build. Never met

Barry because the accelerator hadn't yet been built, hadn't yet exploded. His days consisted of fixing electronics and selling odd parts at his part-time job, the monotony in between ER visits only broken up the appearance of his favorite frenemy. Cisco doesn't know why, out of all people, he wound up meeting Hartley again, but it had been like an epitome of sorts, that these people he kept hallucinating about (including local celebrity Harrison Wells, and another man who looked just like him) might actually be real. Every few months or so, Hartley would blow through like a tornado, buy half the parts in Cisco's shop and denounce the rest as garbage, then try again to convince Cisco to apply to some low-level job at STAR Labs and climb his way up.

"You're lackluster in several ways, Cisquito," he'd say, "but you're still light years ahead of half the idiots I work with."

"That's the nicest thing you've ever said to me, and yet it's still really douchey," Cisco would respond, somewhat touched despite himself. B1 Cisco had had a lot of trouble differentiating between the timeline memories he'd inherited, and the line between jerkass-Hartley and reformed-Hartley was somewhat confusing.

That was his life, until the day Barry Allen walked in, earnest and guilty and spewing off something about time-travel and body-stealing murderers. And then there was a glowing portal and Harry and Jesse again, and Earth-2, and Barry recovering his speed and fixing everything he'd set wrong. Things really escalated at the end there until his B1 self was wiped from existence.

Cisco glosses over the end, since they know how it goes, and launches into the vibe dreams he's been having, where realities blur together. He gets lost sometimes, he explains, between lives he's lived and the intersection of conflicting memories that all reside in him now, especially after the mental hoopla he'd been through during B1. Is he really here, or just stuck in another vibe of a life he's long left behind? Everything is real, which becomes meaningless when he can't tell the difference between present and past.

On most of the days it happens Cisco can come to himself after a few minutes, and when he needs more help, Harry's voice is enough to carry him through and tether him back down. Until yesterday, when he couldn't overcome the unshakeable feeling that none of what he was seeing was real. He wanted to trust the voice on the other end of the phone, knew somewhere inside himself Harry wouldn't lie to him, but he couldn't be sure it wasn't just another old memory, and that when he stepped out the door he wouldn't jerk back awake to the sight of the hospital walls at Central City Memorial that he knew too well. That was when Barry had been sent over to help, the vibe from their contact waking up Cisco's memories that had gone dormant while he was sleeping.

"...yeah, so Harry thought I should probably tell you guys, in case it happens again. And that's basically it! Wow, this was a long lunch. Good thing no one felt like committing any crime today," Cisco babbles at the end of his spiel. No one has said much through his story, except Harry chiming in occasionally to supplement parts of his explanation. He glances over at Caitlin, who looks like she's in the verge of either tears or an angry outburst, but he can't tell which until her mouth wobbles. "Hey, no, it's okay, I'm okay," he hurries to reassure her,

reaching out. She smacks his hand away, then cries out in dismay at his wounded look, taking his hand back in hers and holding on tight.

“Thirteen months, Cisco. This has been going on for *thirteen months*, and you didn't tell us until now. You were never going to tell us, were you?” she realizes, stricken. “Not until Harry convinced you, and *he* only knew because he found you in the middle of a vibe!”

“I didn't think you needed to worry about it,” he says, but this only makes her more upset.

“And why not? Why wouldn't we worry about you losing all sense of reality and forgetting who we are? Why wouldn't we care that you can remember a lifetime's worth of brain hemorrhages and heart failure? Why would you think you couldn't come to us for help, when you spend every single day doing so much for us?” Caitlin's voice rises with each question, tears forming at the edges of her eyes. For all that she considers herself cold or distant, Caitlin has always loved brightly and fiercely, and he knows her anger now isn't directed at him but at his insecurities and the universe that made him this way.

Still, he feels responsible for making her cry, which he'd hoped never to do. “I'm sorry-”

“Don't apologize, you didn't- it's not like you did anything wrong,” she interrupts, using her free hand to scrub furiously at her eyes. Barry, still silent by her side but a thunderstorm of an expression building on his face, hands her one of his grease-free napkins. She smudges the ends of her eyeliner onto it before continuing. “I just want you to be able to trust us with something like this. I'm sorry if we made you feel like you couldn't talk to us. You're not being a burden, or causing trouble or inconveniencing any of us, okay? We're your family.”

That's his weak spot, and she knows it, but it really could be that simple. Cisco's problems are weird as hell, but the team might understand anyway. His family would stick by him regardless. Maybe that's what Harry's been trying to tell him. “Okay. From now on, if I need help, I'll tell you. I promise.” He grips her hand tight and she returns the action, squeezing back, not quite smiling, but it's good enough. There's an ease in tension that he didn't realize was in his shoulders, and a lightness in his pulse. Looks like people have a point when they say communication is key.

“Harry, can you drive Caitlin back to the lab?” Barry's voice grabs Cisco's attention, and he looks over at his friend, who is very clearly troubled still. Huh. “Cisco and I need to talk about something.”

That sounds ominous, but Barry's face doesn't allow for any protest, so Cisco nods, fishing out the keys and depositing them in Harry's open palm. “Yeah, we'll see you guys later. Be careful on your way back; there's tons of potholes on Lafayette.”

“I know how to drive, Cisco,” Harry says, a lot less dryly than Cisco would have expected, but a quick glance at his face shows that even he looks like he's been relieved of a weight. No one's been carrying as many of Cisco's worries as Harry had, and he's never been so grateful to have someone so resilient in his corner.

“Remember, red means stop and green means go,” he tells Harry, who flicks an empty ketchup cup at him.

After Harry and Caitlin leave they clean up the table in silence. Cisco assumed they were going to talk at the restaurant, but Barry leads him outside to the alleyway, asks him to hold on, and then they're off. They stop on the doorstep of the West house, currently empty since all of its occupants are at work.

The next thing he knows, Cisco's on the couch holding a mug of hot water while Barry roots around trying to find where Iris stashed the tea. Barry obviously wants to discuss something, but can't help distracting himself with trying to make Cisco comfortable first.

"Barry, tea's really not necessary. I'm fine with this nice hot cup of boiling water. Why don't you come talk to me instead of upending the kitchen?"

The sound of cabinet doors opening persists for a few seconds longer, then of ceramic clinking, and Cisco's afraid for a moment that Barry's somehow inherited Joe's penchant for smashing mugs, but finally Barry zips over to join him on the couch. Cisco isn't sure if he should prompt him to speak, so he just waits for Barry to gather his thoughts.

Barry's voice doesn't shake – it's carefully neutral, but he can't hide his haunted expression, guilt resurfacing as he speaks to Cisco. "I did this to you," he says slowly, as if he needs to digest the information himself. "The vibe dreams, the hospital visits and health problems."

So they're gonna have this talk now. Cisco winces a bit, but nods. "For the most part. Some of it's my body's fault. You can't help my bad brain chemistry."

Barry puts a hand on Cisco's arm to halt him from coming up with any more excuses. "You don't have to let me off the hook. It's my fault. I knew, after meeting you again, that I caused your condition, but I didn't realize it would follow you back here. I thought that once I fixed the timeline, it would all be over. Like a reset switch."

"Downsides of being ripple-proof. I'm filled with determination," Cisco says, putting his mug down. "No true reset for me."

Unable to contain himself, Barry hops off the couch and begins pacing the floor in front of Cisco. At this point, his voice can't help but waver. "I thought I could fix it all, but I didn't fix anything, did I? I fucked it up, then tried to glue back the broken pieces and pass it off as brand new, but the cracks are always going to be there. You're never going to forget your B1 life, the one I ruined, and there's nothing I can do to change that. I can never make it right for you."

"I'm sorry, Cisco. I should have known. I should've thought about it more, should've remembered what it would do to you, but I couldn't get mom and dad out of my head. I was so fixated on the people I lost that I forgot about the family I still had, and I made a stupid, selfish decision. I'm so sorry."

He stops still, bracing himself for whatever Cisco has to say, and he doesn't look like a hero right now. He looks lost and sad and sorry, and Cisco can feel the misery pulsing from him in a high-pitched wave. And even though he can never really forget what Barry's done to him, Cisco doesn't have it in him not to forgive Barry, who's been through so much but is still so genuinely *good* – who has so many responsibilities to the city that Cisco can't fault him for

clinging on to the one event that's shaped his entire life. He just wishes Barry would think harder before charging into rash decisions, but he's pretty certain that Barry's learned that by now. He stands, holding his arms out, and draws Barry into a hug, resting his head against the crook of his neck and listening to the heartbeat that was quick and arrhythmic with stress begin to even out.

"I'm sorry," Barry mumbles again, slumping against Cisco. He feels almost too lean; Cisco should make sure his energy bars are still working well enough to keep him sustained.

"Barry. What's done is done. I don't expect you to be able to do anything to change it, so don't beat yourself up about it, okay?" He pulls away to squish Barry's face between his hands, but Barry makes a weak groan of protest.

"All this time, you'd brought that timeline home with you, and I never knew. Why didn't I notice?"

"I guess I didn't want you to notice. I wasn't being very open about it."

"But still, I see you everyday, which means all the days you woke up from a bad vibe too, and I couldn't tell something was up? I should've been able to see- if I went back--"

"No! No more time travel," Cisco scolds, shaking him lightly. "Look, you already know how bad it was, but there were some good times in there too, and it's all a part of me now. I can't say I *like* reliving those memories, but there's nothing I can do but move forward. I don't need you to rewrite the past for me. I just need you to be there on the days I can't handle it on my own. Can you do that for me?"

Barry, still limp in stance and radiating a low-key sadness, nods quickly. "Yeah, yeah, of course, anything you need. Call me anytime and I'll come right over. For any problem."

"Calm down there, bro, I don't want you to start jumping every time you get a text. It shouldn't be too often, it's just that some days are going to be worse than others, and I might need you to help me get things straight. I think you'll probably be able to tell from how confused I sound." He smiles at Barry softly, trying to project a sense of calm at him. He loves that Barry never shies away from a job, but heads right into the fray to do what needs to be done, but he also doesn't need Barry getting overzealous and flying to his side every time Cisco tries to contact him.

"Whatever it takes, Cisco. I'm here for you." Barry says solemnly, looking him straight in the eye. He's still too pensive, but he looks more like himself, his natural sunshine complexion returning.

"I know. Thanks for apologizing again, but I already forgave you a long time ago. Just try to lay off the timeline, though, would you?"

That garners a rueful laugh. He rucks a hand through his hair, and smiles sheepishly at Cisco. "Yeah, I think I've learned my lesson by now about fucking around with stuff that I shouldn't. No more messing with the timeline."

“Then there's nothing else for me to ask for. So. Wanna play hooky for the rest of the day?” He waggles his eyebrows, and Barry grins, shaking his head.

“I do, but I have to go check on some results at the CCPD this afternoon. Why don't you come with? Maybe Captain Singh will finally give you that badge you've been hounding him about.”

“Barry, I'm pretty sure that being seen with you will actually hurt my chances. I don't want to be associated with truant CSIs.”

“Wow, I see how it is. Don't expect a wave next time I pass you in the hallway.”

“Okay, stop whining, I'll come with you,” Cisco pretends to grouse as walks with Barry to the kitchen to deposit his practically untouched mug in the sink. Barry suddenly turns and bends down to rummage around in a drawer in the corner; he stands in triumph holding up a box of teabags.

“I knew she hid them here somewhere! Do you still want tea?” Barry asks brightly, waving the box at Cisco, who really couldn't care either way, but if it would make Barry happy to be able to do something for him, then why the hell not.

“Sure, hit me.”

Barry submerges a bag of mystery tea into the mug, before wandering around the kitchen again to find some honey. Cisco watches him fondly, belatedly glad he finally came clean to him and Caitlin about his vibes. Occasionally he forgets that it's okay to let the people you take care of look after you in return. Harry's probably going to be really smug about this tomorrow, but Cisco doesn't think he minds. He's willing to admit he needed that push, and he's grateful Harry was there to give it to him. He can imagine the look on his face now: Harry's eyes bright behind the frame of his glasses, smirking just slightly as he gloats, but the ghost of a true smile underneath. Huh.

Harry does seem to do that a lot around him – tamp down on a grin when Cisco's saying something, because he refuses to admit that he's entertained. Other times, he's less guarded about it, smiling openly, but overall, looking back on it, Harry generally seems happy in his presence.

Maybe Caitlin has a point. But Cisco can't afford to think about Harry and his secret almost-smiles, because Barry has returned with three different kinds of honey and some sort of alternative sweetener, which is obviously going to need all of Cisco's brain power to deal with.

Cisco's eternally ongoing Harry situation will simply have to wait.

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One part of Harry's new initiatives as Cisco's self-appointed training advisor is to encourage him to try and control his subconscious vibes. Cisco has already denounced the plan as nonsense, and after some back and forth they agree that the best course of action is to train

his other powers in the hopes that greater overall control will whip his unconscious brain into shape too.

By now, Cisco can make a weak vibrational blast on command, which is useful for absolutely nothing except sending Harry's papers flying and pinning the blame on Barry. He can manage a much more powerful wave, but only when he's freaking the fuck out, which hasn't been an ability they've learned to harness yet. The glasses have been adjusted and readjusted multiple times, but still to no avail.

On the other hand, he's improved at vibing off people and objects without straining himself, and he's gotten better at staying longer in his unexpected vibes, gathering as much info as possible before he gets thrown back out of the vision. Breaches have become much easier too: just last week, he opened a small portal without the use of the goggles. He's finally able to feel out what separates Earth-1 from Earth-2; now, he just needs more practice learning the vibrations of the matter on Earth-1, and maybe to see if he can pick out the threads that might lead to Earth-3 or beyond. Progress isn't fast, but it's there, and it feels good to know his training is working. And at least now he's secure in the thought that he'll probably never turn to the dark side after all the trouble he's going through.

Today, he's taking a break from upgrading the BOOT to lie on the floor of the cortex and try to push golf balls to the wall. He's realized by now that when he's scared, his only thought when making his blasts is keeping the threat at bay, but this isn't a sustainable way to strengthen his powers. He needs to understand how to create a controlled disruption, and the only way to do that is to become more acquainted with the vibrations of everything around him.

He closes his eyes and extends his hand while trying to feel the frequency of the ball, and of the air between them. It takes a minute, but eventually he can recognize the hum of the atmosphere, and how it differentiates from other objects. There's a curve in space that he catches on when air becomes resin, and he focuses on that and pushes, pressing through space toward that curve and rippling the air in the process. At the same time that he feels the pressure reach a point of resistance, he hears the rattling sound of plastic rolling rapidly against tile, followed by a smack as the ball hits the wall.

When Cisco opens his eyes, he sees the golf ball has reached the wall and bounced away. He fistpumps with a whoop, then swivels around to see if anyone else saw, but he's still alone, since Caitlin's taken the day off. He sits up and grabs another ball from the table, and places it on the floor several feet before him. This time, he sits cross-legged on the ground when he makes the shockwave; he still begins with his eyes closed, but takes a peek when he feels it reach the ball, watching it shoot away in triumph. Until today, his targets had to be both light in weight and right within arms' reach for his blast to be strong enough to move it.

This is how Harry finds him, lying on his stomach and scattering golf balls everywhere with only his powers. Cisco glances sideways up at him when he enters, and waves him over excitedly. "Harry, Harry, look-" he calls, before sending another ball skipping into the medbay.

Harry flings whatever he was holding into a chair and scuttles over. "Do it again." This time, Cisco sends one flying over to hit Harry's shoe. When he grins at Harry, his smile is returned.

“Tremendous. Can you hit a moving target?” Harry asks, scooping the ball up.

“Let's find out. Lob it this way,” Cisco instructs, readying his hand. By now, it barely takes him more than a second to feel out the golf ball, but it'll be different when it's in motion. With an underhand toss, Harry sends the ball his way, and even with the added calculations of its trajectory, Cisco still already has in his mind the amount of pressure he has to exert to send a ripple through the air. Adjusting for the additional force needed to push a moving ball away in the opposite direction, he releases a blast. It's a little too wide in scope, but it does catch the golf ball in its path and send it veering off to the right, out of Cisco's way.

“Did you see that?” he shouts, and Harry gives him a thumbs-up, already jogging to the corner of the room to gather lost golf balls.

“One more time,” Harry says, tossing another ball, a little faster this time. Cisco shoots his hand out, almost as if to catch it, but blasts the ball right back at Harry, who dodges neatly. Without speaking, they try several more times, each time ending with the ball successfully careening off away from Cisco.

Harry observes him carefully with each toss; he nods thoughtfully as the last ball rolls to a stop under the computer station. “We need to work on your aim, but other than that-”

“I think I'm really starting to get it.” Cisco is pretty sure he's bouncing on his heels as he beams.

“I think so too. What was different about today?”

“I dunno, I think I've just finally gotten a feel for the vibrations of certain things after training for so long, and something just clicked. I haven't tried on anything but golf balls yet, but-”

“Well, what are we waiting for? Parking lot,” Harry says, spinning around to exit. The familiar gleam of excitement in Harry's eyes is back. He takes the package he'd left on the chair as he leaves. “Grab whatever you don't mind breaking and meet me out there in five. Time for a training montage.”

Cisco wasn't even aware they had an inflatable snow donut hidden in the STAR Labs closets, but Harry manages to unearth it, along with a whole host of odds and ends like a broken blender and a petrified fruitcake. They leave the heavier objects in spots around the lot for Cisco to blast as he runs by, and the lighter ones are put aside for Harry to toss at him. Cisco spends the rest of the afternoon scattering junk across the parking lot and getting pegged in the forehead by the stress balls and paper towel tubes that he can't deflect in time.

After Cisco sends the fifth chunk in a row of hardened fruitcake at the wheels of one of the STAR Labs vans, Harry calls him over to try something different. Holding the snow tube before him, he tells Cisco to send a blast his way, to try and knock him down.

Cisco levels a disapproving look at him. “Harry, I'm not gonna hit you with one of my vibrational waves.”

“It's completely safe, just go ahead and do it. The tube will act as a buffer.” Harry waves impatiently, and Cisco rolls his eyes, refusing to budge.

“And what happens when you get knocked over? You're going to break your old man hips or something and Jesse will kill me. No thanks.”

“How will you ever know if you can defend yourself from a criminal if you don't practice on someone?” Harry argues, still clutching his tube like a shield. He looks hilariously defenseless, and it makes Cisco snicker even as he feels his exasperation rise at Harry's continued disregard for practicing safe science. Of course he managed to fall for a man who thinks getting people zapped by lightning is a reasonable course of action.

“There are other ways- hey, like my cardboard cutouts! We can go back to the training room I made for Linda. See? Your plans don't always have to involve pain and potential injury, Harry. Take your whole untethered mad scientist shtick down a notch, would you?”

“A cardboard cutout is nothing close to a real person.”

“Then I'll ask if I can borrow some dummies from the CCPD,” Cisco says, taking the snow donut from Harry's hands to prevent any further argument. If he doesn't offer an alternative, Harry will do something insane like jumping out at him from an air duct and wind up getting sent through the ceiling by Cisco's powers.

Harry looks like he's still trying to find a way to convince him, but he can't find much reason to oppose this new suggestion. “Dummies. Well, we'll need to add some weights for that to work.”

“Weights will be fine. I'm not blasting you, and I'm not changing my mind on this. C'mom, let's see if any of that cake is still edible.” He tugs Harry along after him by the wrist, pulling him to the pile of junk they've destroyed and pushed away to the side for collection later.

“Let's not. Actually, this would be a good time for- wait here.” Harry jogs off and returns holding the package he brought in earlier. Cisco sits down next to him while he's ripping through tape, and is presented with the cardboard box to open.

He opens the flaps carefully, curious as to what Harry's been toting all day, but he never expected to see a half gallon jar of the Earth-2 lollipops they keep around STAR Labs for visiting children. They're glassy and speckled with what looks like stardust, and they come in a variety of fancy flavors, way nicer than any he's ever found in the shops here. Every time he returns to Earth-2, Cisco stops by the reception desk and stuffs his pocket full, which Harry had apparently noticed.

“I picked it up last time we crossed over. Hid them under Jesse's cot since I know you can vibe the presence of sugar.”

“Are these for me?” Cisco asks tentatively, but his hands are clamped tight around the jar without any intention of letting go.

“Do you think I'm just trying to show off my impressive candy collection?”

“Wouldn't be the weirdest thing you've done, you strange, inscrutable man.”

“Just have a lollipop, Cisco.”

Cisco does so with gusto, picking out a pale pink one that tastes like strawberry shortcake and sticking it in his mouth without further hesitation. “Mmm,” he hums around the candy in his mouth, slitting his eyes back open to examine Harry, whose gaze skitters away from his lips. Hm. Cisco removes the sucker from his mouth with a pop, watching Harry twitch at the sound. “Is this a bribe? You want something from me, don't you?” He points his lollipop at the other man.

“What could I possibly want from you?” Harry asks blandly.

“Hell if I know. Maybe you've created some elaborate scheme to get in my good graces in order to gain access to...uh...”

“The Flash? Your STAR Labs security clearance? Your one bedroom apartment? Your Xena DVDs?” Harry's smirk grows with each question and the only reason Cisco doesn't just stick the lollipop right to his terrible face is because it would be senselessly wasteful.

“Hey, that boxed set cost me a pretty hefty chunk of change.” With his lollipop back where it belongs, he leans back on his hands, musing over the situation. “Not a bribe then. Something much, much more heinous is afoot.”

“Or sometimes a gift is just a gift.” The could-be-a-smile at Harry's lips blooms into something real, and Cisco finds himself flushing like an amateur. His gaze shies away, down to the jar which he carefully replaces the lid to.

“Oh. That's...really nice of you, actually. Thank you.” He musters enough strength to glance up at Harry, who looks relaxed for once, no lines of motion tracing his body.

“You're welcome.” Something about the way he says it, satisfied and at ease, pings off Cisco's paranoia radar.

“You know this only makes me more suspicious of you.”

Harry laughs, and Cisco's stomach flip-flops at the sound. Even his organs are over-dramatic. “A little wariness is healthy. It keeps you on your toes.”

“You are *so* sketchy, but I can't even care 'cause these taste so good. You should have one. A reward for helping me train today.” He shakes the jar at Harry, who blocks it with one hand.

“I'll decline. I'm not big on candy.”

Cisco scoffs. “What? That's a straight lie. I've seen you sneak one of my sour gummy worms before.”

“They're slightly better than lollipops,” Harry admits.

“Okay! Let's go get you some gummy worms. My treat.”

“I'm not so into gelatinous bugs that I need you to buy me any.”

“Something else, then. You've gotta have a favorite candy. I've seen you in the kitchen; you love sugar almost as much as I do.” He still hasn't managed to dissuade Harry from eating raw batter like some sort of filthy animal. It's an unexpected failing.

“Fine, I like zizzle sticks, but they don't exist here.” Harry holds his hands in the air about six inches apart, to impart some information about the length of these zizzle sticks, but it doesn't really clarify anything.

“First of all, I'mma need you to hook me up with one of these so called ‘zizzle sticks’ next time we go dimension hopping. And second, I'll find you a new favorite, as part of the Integrate into Earth-1 Initiative that I'm starting right now. We're going to the candy store!”

“We are not going to the candy store,” Harry responds, but he's already allowing himself to be dragged toward the van.

They don't. They go instead to Central City's largest supermarket, straight to the candy aisles. Cisco intends to pick out some likely contenders, but the sheer scope of the task overwhelms him when he's faced with the packed shelves that stretch on for yards. So he starts grabbing one of everything and tossing it in the cart.

Harry watches him in vague horror. “You are the definition of excessive.”

“Dear, sweet, naive Harry. How can we reach a definitive conclusion if we don't test every single product? You take care of these and I'll go tackle the chocolate section.” He wraps Harry's fingers around a package of life savers and leaves to collect chocolate.

Halfway through, Harry returns the bulk of the Lindt and Ghirardelli chocolate bars Cisco put in (“Raspberry, orange, and apricot? Pomegranate? Why? Put these back.”) and further pares down the list by banning anything with nuts. They decide that he probably won't like anything that involves powder, and that Earth-1 liquorice doesn't measure up to Earth-2's, and by the time they're done the cart is loaded up with enough junk that Cisco can coast down the aisle without tipping it under his weight. He almost knocks over a peanut butter jar display when Harry throws a bag of marshmallows across his path.

Harry takes control of the cart on their way to the checkout, to prevent any further collisions, but Cisco has to nudge him in the side when he starts frowning at the contents of their cart.

“Why the bad face?”

“Besides the fact that we're two grown men buying over a hundred dollars' worth of candy long before Halloween?”

“Hey. What else am I gonna spend my paycheck on? If I can't build a functional lightsaber, it's not like there's someone else I could pay to do it.”

Harry shrugs, reaching out to tug at the collar of Cisco's purple t-shirt. “A wardrobe upgrade?”

“You know you love my carefully curated collection of graphic tees. You'd miss them if they were gone.”

“Some occasions call for a little more formality. Do you even own a tie?” Harry releases the shirt to prod directly at his neck instead. The calloused pad of his finger drags along Cisco's pulse point and he barely manages to suppress a shiver.

“I have one! One and a half, probably, if we ignore the burn marks,” Cisco says defensively, trying not to let out an embarrassing sound and make it weird. “Do you?” he shoots back as his brain demands he get out of the danger zone *right this second*. There are a few too many lines he's crossed already, and these days it feels harder than ever to stop their friendly banter from descending into flirtatious banter, but he's held out so far. He really doesn't want to fuck up while standing in line for the self-checkout.

“I used to,” Harry says, removing his hand to pluck at his own (black, of course) sweater, and not a moment too soon. A few seconds longer and he would have noticed the escalation in Cisco's heartbeat until his fingertips. “I haven't had need to hold a press conference as of late. Let's hope that trend continues.”

“Yeaaaaah, let's try not to have you wind up on the news for any reason. That'd be much more ‘splaining than I'd wanna deal with.”

On their way back to the lab, Harry begins rummaging through the plastic bags, scrutinizing each package with skepticism. He settles the bag back in his lap after scowling at everything inside, dissatisfied. Cisco raises an eyebrow at this preemptive spat of petulance, asking, “Frowning already, scowly? You don't even have a reason yet!”

“No reason? Where are the chocolate frogs? The sugar quills? Where's the amazing Earth-1 candy I was promised?”

“You huge nerd!” Cisco accuses with delight. “So that's what you were using my e-reader for. You're coming with me to this year's Harry Potter con in Midway City. Don't even argue with me on this; I'm dragging you along. I'll even help you make a robe.”

Using his teeth, Harry rips open a roll of sweet-tarts, shaking several into his mouth before Cisco can tell him that's not the best idea. “Do you really think you have a chance of getting me into a robe?”

“Dude, robes are black, nondescript, and spooky. That's totally your style. The real question is...what house are you? Since we are both apparently short on ties, we'd better go get some to complete the look.”

Harry, mouth pinched from sourness, presses a few sweet-tarts into Cisco's palm. “Hufflepuff.”

“Don't even start. Ravenclaw? Is it too obvious? Gryffindor, maybe.”

“Really?”

“Yeah: brave, self-righteous, reckless? That sounds like you. You'd look better in blue, though.”

“I don't think red works for any of us but Barry,” Harry says, wincing when he bites through a candy tablet. “What are these flavors? Green apple? Are we too good for lime now?”

“It would help if you didn't try to eat them all together at once,” Cisco says as he pulls back into the parking lot. Their garbage is still sitting in a pile in an empty space to be dealt with later.

When Jesse returns home from work, she almost trips on her own feet when she sees them sprawled across the cortex floor surrounded by wrappers, scattered bits of candy, and piles of yet unopened sweets. The whiteboard is covered by a large graph detailing their findings so far, still a work in progress even though Cisco has already crashed. Harry, full of stalwart spirit, continues grimly on with a handful of malt balls.

“Is this what you guys do when I leave you alone?” she asks, laughing when Cisco waves her feebly over. She kicks him gently to shake loose the piece of foil stuck to his shirt.

He grabs her ankle weakly. “It's the end for me, Jesse. Remember, everything the light touches is our kingdom,” he says in the deepest voice he can manage, waving at the confectionary wreckage all over the room.

“So this'll all be mine, is what you're saying.”

“Everything...everything except this one. And those.” He points to the small bag of nonpareils under the desk, and grabs the special chocolate bar to his right and slides it in his pocket. Dark chocolate with sea salt caramel filling.

“Not sure I want any of it. Dad, you look like you're at the end of your rope,” she tells Harry, who's stopped eating to look over the board.

“I think we're done here,” he responds, handing Jesse his unopened bag of skittles. He uncaps his marker and circles a word in the upper left quadrant. “Twizzlers.”

Cisco, hollow and dry inside from eating too many sweets, lifts his head long enough to peek at the board before lolling back over. “Twizzlers? Are you sure? I thought you only scored them a 7 for taste.”

“Outside factors gave them a boost.” Harry begins circling the room like a crow, plucking up everything still edible and depositing it into Jesse's arms.

“It's just because they're easy to steal from me, I bet.” Cisco sends some low-level waves at the cherry cordials Harry was about to pick up. He only intends to push them a few feet away, but the plastic box tumbles into the wall with a splat.

“That might be it,” Harry says, crouching down next to Cisco and fishing the bar out of his pants pocket. “This-” and he peers closely at the chocolate's label, “this is me, isn't it?” It's really quite a shame that the self-satisfaction on his face doesn't make him any less hot. How

obnoxious. There's that temptation again, to wholeheartedly chuck Plan B right out the window, to pull Harry down and make his feelings explicitly clear, but after eating probably a literal pound of sugar it might be time for some restraint.

“Bittersweet and salty? Yeah. Quit smirking and get back in my pants.” Cisco wiggles his hips until Harry complies and replaces the bar in its pocket, still smug, still too close and not close enough for Cisco’s liking.

“Yeah, you two are too much for me to deal with alone,” Jesse declares. She wanders out of the room, arms full of loot, mumbling to herself. “Where’s Caitlin? I can’t believe this.”

“What’s up with that?” Cisco asks Harry, who watches her go, shaking his head fondly.

“Just a teenage daughter being embarrassed by her father.” He sounds hopelessly warmed by it, and Cisco is reminded again of how glad he was to see them reunited. Jesse may be branching out into her own world now, but she’ll always have her place here with the rest of the team.

“Can you blame her? You rated Mike & Ike higher than pop rocks. Who does that?” He extends his legs so that his ankles rest crossed on Harry’s knee.

“I fully believe that the existence of pop rocks explains the stagnation in your Earth’s energy innovation. And the eventual downfall of society as a whole.”

“Right, I’m sure that’s it. Popocalypse 2024. Oceans will rise! Empires will crumble. Only the Flash can save us now!”

Harry’s posture is loose as he leans back on his hands. He doesn’t shake Cisco’s feet off his lap, and the way he sits, angled toward Cisco, makes him seem accessible, attainable. Within reach, if Cisco were to try. Harry’s tone is filled with a facetious curiosity when he asks, “Only the Flash? I’ve heard rumors of another meta superhero on the scene. What was his name? Started with a ‘V’, I think.”

Cisco blinks back at him before poking himself in the chest. “Who, me? I made some good progress today, but I think you’re getting ahead of yourself.”

“Am I? At the rate you’re improving, in seven years’ time I’m sure you could stop an apocalypse or two.” Harry isn’t one for empty platitudes, and Cisco can feel it himself, the power bubbling under the surface of his skin, that lies mostly untamed but present – so present in him that sometimes he wonders if he can keep it all contained. The fear that he might wind up like Reverb isn’t as strong as it used to be, but he always keeps it in the back of his mind as a cautionary tale to not take his powers lightly. If the end of the world descends, he should be stopping it, not causing it. Even as he trains, he needs to remember his responsibilities.

“I’ve gotta keep practicing if we want to reach that point,” Cisco says, lifting his hands up into the air to examine them. Funny how he doesn’t look any different, and yet everything’s changed. “You free on Thursday? Wanna throw more expired food at me?” he asks Harry,

who's surveying the mess they've left. "I'll buy you a nice lunch," he offers, as if Harry really needs any convincing.

Harry mulls it over anyway. "Are you going to make it worth my while?" His gaze catches on Cisco's face and settles there, heavy with a sudden, unspoken weight. Cisco recognizes the challenge in his voice, but it isn't belligerent, despite the underlying heat. It's much more terrifying, much more exciting. This isn't their regular dance. It's something new and dangerous.

"That depends on what you want." He shouldn't be doing this. He's been getting careless, and there would be nothing more careless than this, starting something that he's already too invested in. But Cisco is tired of wanting from afar.

He's tired of playing it safe, of guarding himself so closely, when everyday he catches Harry looking at him from across the cortex, smiling at him ever so slightly whenever he speaks, falling into step with him when he exits the room. Like magnets, Caitlin said. Two people drawn to each other again and again, over any distance or dimension. Maybe that's all this is for Harry, just electricity and attraction, and that should be reason enough for Cisco to turn away. He's too far gone to fall into a whirlwind affair built on magnetism alone.

But what if it's more than that?

Cisco's always been an optimist – pragmatic, sure, but an optimist at heart – and a little bit foolhardy when it comes to his feelings, so he accepts this new dance warily, taking one measured, deliberate step forward. His tone matches Harry's, enough so that the implications are clear, but the ball remains in Harry's court.

"What could I possibly want from you?" Harry says, a reprise of his earlier words, but it's not a dismissal. He pushes himself forward and rests one hand on Cisco's leg as his line of sight drops from Cisco's eyes to his lips, then his neck. Then lower still.

"You tell me," Cisco responds, sitting up so he's resting on his elbows. He cants his head, so that his hair falls away from the line of his throat, and watches as Harry follows the motion. Then slowly, careful not to jostle Harry's wrist from his calf, he uncrosses his ankles, letting his legs spread apart just slightly. Harry tracks that as well, and when their eyes finally meet again, Harry's are a darker shade of blue than Cisco's ever noticed before.

If he couldn't feel the vibrations of the air this morning, he certainly can now, shimmering all around him in a frenzy of heat. He's afraid to move any further and disturb the fragile system of energy around them, but it looks like he won't have to, because Harry's hand on his leg tightens its grip and begins to-

"Guys, what did you do to the parking lot? Jesse didn't know anything about it either, and it's not exactly the right season for spring cleaning anymore, and- wait, what is *this*, some sort of bacchanale- are you, oh. Oh. You two seem busy." Caitlin freezes awkwardly in the doorway, face caught in a rictus of surprise and chagrin, still kind of adorable despite how mortified she looks. They should have heard her coming down the hallway long ago, announced by the familiar click of her heels, but it comes as a surprise regardless. A splash of ice water, enough to shock Cisco out of his trance and back to reality.

“Nah, we’re not, come over here. I got you something,” he says, withdrawing his legs, twisting up and away so he’s no longer facing Harry, no longer directly broadcasting what he wants at the man he wants. The loss of contact is both painful and a relief, and he can feel Harry’s eyes on his back as he crawls over to the desk to get Caitlin her nonpareils.

He scoots under the desk so that he comes out on the other side, and stands to drop the bag in Caitlin’s hands. She receives his gift dutifully, but her eyes continue bugging out while she fails to decide if she wants to speak or not. Cisco waits patiently for her, pretending he isn’t on the verge of overheating.

“Thanks, um. For these. You always remember my favorite,” Caitlin finally says, jiggling the bag, very obviously distracted still. He can tell her gears are turning in double-time, trying to parse the situation before it slips away from her. “I was going to see if you wanted to get dinner after I checked on- well, it can wait until tomorrow. The samples and dinner. I think I’m just going to go?” She gestures at the door, but Cisco shakes his head rapidly.

“No, stay; Harry and I were just about to clean up anyway. Dinner sounds super. You can look at your samples and we’ll go once I’m done here.” He needs the distraction of her company now. If she leaves them here alone he’s either going to make it excruciatingly awkward or do something really dumb.

Caitlin isn’t convinced. “Are you sure? Because I could go- Jesse’s back in her room, and she and I could go...hang out with Iris and Linda! Who are off work soon.” Caitlin keeps shooting meaningful glances from Cisco to Harry, still somewhere behind him, while her expression grows more fiery by the second. “We will go do girl stuff, while you two do your thing here. Together.”

“Sorry, Jesse and I already made prior plans tonight,” Harry interjects. They both swivel to look at him. He’s begun gathering the loose wrappers from the floor to put in the bin. He makes eye contact with Cisco for just a second, long enough for him to recognize the out he’s being given.

So he takes it before he can change his mind. “See? Don’t wanna intrude on their dad-daughter bonding time. We can go to that fusion place they were talking about on the radio.”

“Okay, if you’re really, really sure,” Caitlin says dubiously, striding across to her med bay while eying the two of them.

While she works they gather up the rest of their mess in silence. They finish before Caitlin does, so Harry weaves away to the exit once everything’s in the bin, with only one quick glance back at Cisco. The smart thing would be to just let him go, but Cisco doesn’t want him to leave with this hanging in the air between them, so he jogs after him, catching Harry a few steps down the corridor. Instinct causes him to grab Harry’s arm, and like clockwork Harry turns, even before Cisco has a chance to pull him to a stop.

Cisco should have thought this through a little more, because now he’s standing all too close to Harry again in a dimly lit hallway and he’s thinking about all the wrong things.

“Thursday,” is what he leads with, in a left-field attempt to continue their conversation before

it went sideways. “Lunch? I’ll bring the twizzlers, you bring the busted printer from the third storeroom?”

The space between them isn’t dense with heat the way it was ten minutes ago, but somehow this moment feels equally important. Harry regards him, searching for something, always searching, but Cisco doesn’t know what he’s trying to find. He doesn’t know what might be missing.

“Thursday,” Harry confirms. “Lunch on me. Maybe I’ll even take you down to the junkyard, see if you can overturn a car or rip a door off its hinges.” He smiles a bit, dry and terribly sweet, and Cisco knows they’ll be alright.

“Wow, you sure know how to win a guy over,” Cisco teases. “You’re on. Have a good time with Jesse.”

He steps back, withdrawing his arm with the intent to return to Caitlin, but Harry catches hold of his hand and sweeps his thumb gently over the lines of Cisco’s palm before letting go. “See you tomorrow,” he says: an ordinary, everyday promise, but Cisco understands it to be the reassurance it was intended as.

“Tomorrow morning, bright and early,” he promises back.

Harry walks off toward his room without turning around, but there’s no uncertainty from his departures anymore. Cisco knows he won’t be leaving again. And even if today wasn’t the right time to test the boundaries on whatever’s developing between them, there’ll always be tomorrow. As many tomorrows as it takes.

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They probably should have talked about it. But neither of them bring it up, and it never really becomes a problem. Things aren't quite the *same*; nowadays there's an undercurrent of awareness that passes between them when someone's inhibitions become thin. Harry is fully aware of those moments when Cisco thinks about how easily he could lean up and kiss Harry, just as Cisco can tell from Harry's line of sight that he's thinking about closing the distance and pressing Cisco up against the desk.

But neither of them ever goes through with it. They retain their asymptotic trajectory, never drawing near enough to let their desires cross. Cisco doesn't know what Harry's reasons for restraint are, but he appreciates the lack of hurry, the easy, languid pace they take in circling each other.

He isn't sure exactly what Harry's feelings are, nor is he certain Harry understands just how deep the river runs in him, but in any case, Plan B's more or less gone to the wolves. This isn't exactly the catastrophic setback he had expected, but it does call for Cisco to reassess his course of action. He scraps Plans C and D, and settles on the slow implementation of Plan E.

Plan E:

- 1) Test the waters.

It's vague, he knows, but he doesn't want to add too much definition to what they're doing now. Which is almost literally exactly what they were doing before, but with more subtext. It should be weird, maybe, that they can continue like nothing's changed even though they're both completely aware that it has.

It actually bothers the rest of the team much more than it does the two of them. Cisco thinks it might actually drive Caitlin over the edge. She and Cisco exchange Looks-with-a-capital-L like parrying blows whenever Harry leaves the room, each of hers growing more insistent as his become more intentionally quizzical. She always stop short of directly asking, after her first unsuccessful attempt, instead sending Barry to do her dirty work for her.

Barry, however, can be easily distracted. He starts strong, coming to hang around Cisco when they have downtime, starting the conversation off normally to lull Cisco into a sense of ease, before segueing into his attack with no grace whatsoever.

“Every single Pixar movie? I mean, obviously the beginning of *Up*, and with *Toy Story 3*, *Inside Out*, I get, but like. *Cars 2*? For real?” Barry asks, resting his arms on the back of his chair. He’s watching Cisco test some old equipment to see if it’s worth keeping or donating.

“There were some sniffles coming on about two-thirds through,” Cisco says, throwing his hands up in defeat when the centrifuge refuses to start for the third time. “What can I say? They really know how to bring out the feels.”

“Yeah, speaking of feels, uh. How’s your- how’s the dating scene going? For you? Are you seeing anybody new? That I should know about?” It’s so painfully not nonchalant that Cisco has to bite his lip to keep from laughing. Barry, bless his heart, has no espionage skills. Cisco wasn’t even sure at first whether he had noticed the source of Caitlin’s current frustrations, but he’s heard and seen the telltale sign of flyaway papers fluttering in empty doorways often enough to know that Barry’s probably caught him and Harry engaging in their thing-that’s-not-a-thing a fair number of times.

Cisco places the centrifuge into Barry’s empty hands while he’s pretending to be only casually invested in the answer to his question. “Bro, trust me, if I were you’d be the first to know. But hey, that reminds me, did you buy a new dress shirt for Iris’ gala yet?”

Barry takes the bait without a single pause. “I- wait, should I? I thought it was a small newspaper thing. I was just gonna go business casual?”

“No, no, wow, you really haven’t read the flyer at all, have you? It’s probably in your email somewhere. You better get thee to the mall when we’re done here.” Barry scrabbles for his phone, scrolling through his unread messages faster than Cisco can see. His eyes go suddenly wide and Cisco laughs at how deer in the headlights he looks. “Hey, I’ll come with you, don’t worry. It’s still a week away; you’re fine.”

“Mall. Good plan. I should, um. What should I do with this?” Barry holds the centrifuge up in confusion, and Cisco points him over to the scrap pile. Barry trots over unsteadily, and Cisco knows he must be mentally reviewing his entire closet right now, his original train of thought utterly derailed. Easy.

But when Barry realizes he failed, he deploys Iris. Tricks don't work on Iris, nor does evasion. He expects her to be a difficult opponent, but she gifts him with her mercy and lets him off the hook quickly.

“So,” she says, perching with her legs crossed on the desk next to him one afternoon while everyone else is out of the room. “Barry and Caitlin want me to ask you something.”

“The terrible twosome,” Cisco mutters, handing her one of his special Earth-2 lollipops. She likes the rhubarb pie ones.

“But I won't, if you clear something up for me,” she says, recognizing the bribe. It's a toss up which option is more dangerous, but he'd rather take the wild card over the known threat.

“Let's hear it.”

“When you said way back when that Harry was being weird...you didn't mean platonic weird, did you?” Cisco had almost forgotten he'd asked for her opinion on the matter so many months ago.

The phrasing is odd, but he understands what she's getting at. Looking back on it, there's no clear indication either way: Harry's become less acerbic toward everyone, growing tolerant of their bright and sunny dispositions. He's become closer to each member of the group, as their overall teamwork became more tight-knit, but Cisco doesn't think he would be wrong in saying there's always been something a bit deeper between just the two of them. At every turn, he recalls little gestures meant only for him, secret moments that seem oddly meaningful in retrospect.

“I don't know,” he tells her honestly. “I think you were right about him letting us in, allowing himself to care and become a better person for both his sake and ours. But it feels like something else changed while I wasn't paying attention. Changed in a maybe not so platonic way.” He meets her eyes straight on, but she doesn't react beyond smiling at him and sticking her lollipop in her mouth.

“I know all about becoming not so platonic,” Iris says, her eyes going soft at the thought of Barry. “I hope things work out for you the way you want them to, whatever that might be.” There's a finality to her words, like she won't be pursuing this further, and she jumps off the desk as the sound of the others filters down from the hallway.

“Iris, if they ask,” Cisco begins, because he knows they're going to ask, but Iris shakes her head, placing a finger to her lips.

“There's nothing to tell. You never answered their question,” she says, and it's as simple as that. It's not even that he minds their badgering, but when he doesn't even have an answer himself, there's nothing he can do to assuage their curiosity, so he just evades instead.

Besides, these days there are bigger fish to fry. Strange crimes, stranger metas, not to mention the conspiracies and alliances amongst those in the underworld who want the Flash out of the picture. They have their hands full juggling all the trouble Central City has to throw at them, as well as out-of-towners leaking in from Starling City and Metropolis.

Finally comes a day quiet enough that movie night gets put back on the docket. Technically it's Jesse's turn to pick, but when Cisco finds out neither she nor Wally have ever actually seen *The Princess Bride*, he demands that they rectify the grievous situation immediately. Joe notes that he hasn't seen it since Iris was really young, and Jesse has no objections to her choice getting hijacked, so they set up the projector in the cortex. While the others arrange the seats, Cisco sets about making the largest batch of popcorn possible with Jesse's help. They're drizzling a disgusting amount of butter into the bowl when Barry shows up in the doorway.

"Everything's all set up, so we're just waiting on the snacks. You want me to help?" He grabs an armful of sodas, but hovers around to watch them work.

"Do you know the secret to perfect butter distribution?" Jesse asks archly.

"There's a secret?"

"Right, thanks for the offer, but I think we've got this." She dismisses him with a consoling pat on the arm, and he splutters at the pity in her voice.

"Alright, I'll leave you butter geniuses to your work then." He leaves with the first round of drinks, and reappears for the next, but before he leaves the second time, he wanders over to watch them again, leaning against the counter all casual-style. Cisco suspects another attempt at subterfuge is on its way.

"Princess Bride...is there a reason you chose your go-to date movie for tonight?" Barry looks genuinely curious, so maybe he's become a better actor in the last two weeks.

"Since when is it my 'date movie'?" Cisco deflects. "I prefer to think of it as an all-purpose, any occasion kind of movie. A timeless classic."

"C'mon, who are you kidding, it's totally your date movie. Kendra, that time with that girl in college, that firefighter you met last year," Barry ticks off each instance on his fingers and Cisco resists bombarding him with popcorn. Should've known those stories would come back to haunt him.

"What firefighter?" Jesse asks, suddenly on high alert. "Since when has there been a firefighter in the picture?"

"Since never! He's just a dude I met once or twice," Cisco answers. It was one of two dates he tried before he realized that Harry had already become too much of an issue to be so easily forgotten.

Barry gives her a knowing glance as they splash butter. "By 'just a dude' he means a hot firefighter who was probably on a charity pinup calendar at some point in his life, and by 'once or twice', he means they went to dinner and watched *The Princess Bride* and then ma-"

Cisco stuffs a handful of popcorn in his gob to shut him up. "It was a literal year ago, we went on one date, and then I never saw him again. He was a nice guy, but I had, uh.

Extenuating circumstances.” He waves his hand around a vague fashion and Jesse suppresses a smile as they finish tossing the popcorn in its massive bowl.

“So you admit it was a date!” Barry crows after swallowing, and Cisco pelts him with a kernel.

“Okay, fine, it's my date movie! And that's why we're watching it today! Because *this* one,” he flings an arm at Jesse, “almost choked on her own tongue last week when we saw Wally with a girl at Jitters-”

“I did not!” Jesse exclaims. “I was just drinking my mocha too fast. Wally being there with his friend was just an incidental event.”

Cisco sucks the smudge of melted butter and salt off his thumb while rolling his eyes. “Sure, whatever you say. Meanwhile, *that* one,” pointing off in the general direction of the cortex where Wally is, “has brought lunch to the Mercury Labs security guard every day for the last three days because he keeps forgetting to ask if you’re actually available to eat with him. You were not.”

“What?!” Jesse fishes her phone out and begins rereading her old texts. “He never mentioned it.”

“Is that why Iris said he couldn't show his face around there anymore?” Barry asks.

“Yeah, Caitlin says that the last time he went over with her, everyone at the front desk knew him by name. So. Because some people seem like they need a little push, we are watching the greatest date movie of all time. Now let's go, or they'll start without us.”

Cisco is pleased to find that Jesse settles into a seat next to Wally, both of them exchanging shy glances before she says something that makes him laugh. Good. He sits in a safe spot between Barry and Joe, who opens up a can of root beer for him. Harry is on Caitlin’s far side, away from temptation, so Cisco can concentrate on the movie without making sidelong glances all night.

Around the time Westley and Buttercup are tumbling down a hill, Cisco receives a text, so he slips out of the room. The message is from Dante, reminding him of the family gathering next month, along with an oblique reference to a childhood event he had completely forgotten. He knows it's something that happened when they were much younger, a shared moment of mischief back when they still hadn't learned to find all their own faults in each other, but the details are hazy. At first, he's only going to text back, but he thinks about all those long hours at the hospital that another Dante devoted to another him, the years of difficult but fond memories that don't completely belong to him but that he still feels a nostalgia for. He remembers the continued strain between himself and his parents that still persists, and he dials Dante's before he can back out.

"Hello?" Dante sounds unnecessarily confused.

"The hydrangeas, whose were they?" Cisco asks, trying to remember the story he’s referencing.

"Is this really the fabled Cisco? Calling me? Could it be?"

"I get it, I get it, I don't call enough. But why call when I can text?"

"Spare your poor pianist brother's fingers, would you?" Dante's using an exaggerated version of the voice he always does in order to get what he wants, and Cisco snorts.

"You're saying you'd rather hear me talking?"

"You have the voice of an angel, after all. Ah," and Dante switches to Spanish in a warbling imitation of their aunt, "mijo, why don't you sing along with Dante? Play the one your grandmother likes, you know the one. Just make up the words, no one knows any better anyway--"

Cisco isn't sure whether to laugh or shudder so he does a combination of both. "It's downright eerie how well you can pull that off. I haven't even seen auntie Ana in- wait, hold up. Were they her hydrangeas?"

"No, aunt Isabel. She has the house with the porch in the back, you remember? The hydrangeas by the sidewalk, and the rabbit holes under the porch floor."

Cisco recalls a sun-drenched afternoon spent running free with his older brother before things got complicated. "We spent the whole party trying to catch that rabbit. You almost knocked over the drinks and I ruined a brand new pair of overalls," he reminisces. "No big loss, though."

"Overalls are stupid. You said so back then too," Dante laughs, and it's a nice sound, genuine and freely given. "We're meeting at Isaac's new place; I'll send you the address later. Did you know he has a three-legged dog now?"

It starts with a story about the dog, and then the encounter Cisco had at the laundromat with the one high school English teacher they both had, then Dante's concert at Keystone City, and suddenly half an hour's passed. Cisco is missing the entire movie, but he doesn't care, even if it is *The Princess Bride*. It feels easier than it's been for years, and it gives him hope that the family get together will only be a little awkward, and not a nuclear warzone. He's got Dante on his side now.

They wrap up the conversation so Dante can go to dinner, but Cisco remains sitting against the wall for a minute longer after hanging up. His eyes drift closed as he thinks to himself, *this is real and this is now; this is the timeline where I'm supposed to be.*

He can feel the presence of another person, the vibrational energy of a living being, before he hears the footsteps approaching him. When he opens his eyes he sees Harry standing a few feet away, holding a bowl of corn chips and looking pensive. Somehow the image strikes him as particularly absurd and he laughs, waving Harry over.

"Out of popcorn already?" he asks as Harry lowers himself to the ground next to him.

"Joe made the mistake of letting Barry hold the bowl. Important call?"

“Important, but not in the way you think. It was Dante. We talked.” He says it with a shrug, but Harry nods, understanding the significance. The chips rest before them, looking forlorn and bare in their metal bowl. Cisco takes one and bites off the corner, tasting salt on his tongue. “Wouldn't it have been more efficient to send Barry to refill the snacks? You'll miss the movie.”

“I've seen it before. Elizabeth made me come see it at the theater with her. I was surprised by how much she liked it.” Harry doesn't talk much about his wife, but whenever he does, he always looks younger somehow. Like he was more alive when she was. Cisco would have liked to see that: a Harry who smiled more, who wasn't always slightly exhausted and run down. But all the same, he wouldn't trade this Harry away for anyone.

“How could you not? It has everything. Fencing, fighting, torture, revenge, giants, monsters-”

“-chases, escapes, True Love, miracles,” Harry finishes dryly to Cisco's pleasant surprise. “I know the spiel. Do you know how many times I've gotten ‘I do not think it means what you think it means’ in response to my arguments?”

Cisco grins, imagining the look on his face. “I'm sure you deserved it.”

“I did.” Harry smiles faintly and traces the space on his finger where a ring would have been. “You two would have gotten along. Too well, probably.”

“I'll bet. Anyone who can put up with you must be a keeper. What was she like?” Cisco has heard anecdotes from Jesse, but she had been young when her mother passed.

Harry doesn't answer immediately, and when he does, his tone is similar to the one he uses when he speaks about Jesse. There's a certain wonder to it, as if he can't help but be surprised still, after all these years, that he could love and be loved by such incredible people. It's about as sentimental as he ever gets, but on certain days, Cisco hears traces of it in his voice when he talks to the rest of the team.

“She liked grapefruit, dogs who shed too much, and wearing ugly hats. Absolutely hideous ones made out of felt and animal prints and cheap elastic. She had always wanted to go to space, but her asthma automatically knocked her out of consideration, so she decided to become one of the most decorated chemical engineers in the country instead of an astronaut.

“She loved playing arcade games, but she sucked at them. A lot. She could waste a ten dollar roll of quarters in an hour. She was much better at badminton. She used to purposely try and hit my feet with the shuttlecock. She liked watching foreign films, but only action movies. She hated public speaking, but she used to do all the PR for the lab because she thought I would try and fight the reporters. She was right. The first press release I did after she died, I almost punched someone. He would have deserved it; he was an idiot.

“She was the least romantic person I've ever known, but she still loved that movie. Near the end, she started worrying about me a lot more. Said that she knew Jesse would be fine, because her daughter is as brave as she is brilliant, but that I was a different story. A menace to myself.”

“She was right. You're a menace to everyone,” Cisco says, nudging him with his knee. Elizabeth knew exactly what she was talking about. It's obvious from a glance that Harry did his best by Jesse, but only remembers about 50% of the time to look after himself. “Good thing you have us now to help you take care of yourself. Elizabeth can finally rest easy.”

“Who's taking care of whom? I distinctly remember saving you from drowning yourself in the shower only a week ago.” That had certainly been an event, with Cisco wet, shivering, and confused as to why Harry was trying not to yell or let his eyes wander as he dragged Cisco out of the shower and toward a towel. He thought he had already gotten that meta's sleeping gas out of his system, but it was not so. Barry ran in a split second later, saw the scene at hand, and shook his head slowly, backing out of the bathroom.

“True, but who was it that almost got crushed by a falling I-beam? Hint: not me.” Barry swept Harry out of the way long before he could be hit, but Cisco blew the damn thing into a wall anyway.

“The mosquito riots,” Harry says, crossing his arms.

“The Gorgon incident,” Cisco counters as he snaps off another piece of his chip. “We could do this all night, but I think we're gonna break even in the end. We take care of each other, how 'bout that? Compromise?”

“You know I hate compromises,” Harry says, letting Cisco lean against him, their arms pressed together.

“You also hate cream cheese and still went to town on that red velvet cupcake I got you.” From inside the cortex comes the sound of swords clashing as Inigo Montoya mounts his revenge. Cisco mouths along with the words as Inigo's speech becomes more and more fervent, and from the periphery of his vision, he catches Harry looking at him like he's some sort of miracle. A minor celestial phenomenon or an undiscovered marvel of the seas – something odd and new and wonderful.

Cisco doesn't want to draw attention to it, lest it cause Harry to flee, but sometimes his mouth acts on its own. “I really changed your outlook on cream cheese, didn't I?”

“Not cream cheese. On a few other subjects, maybe,” Harry concedes. His hand lies on the gap between their legs, a point of heat against Cisco's thigh. It hasn't been a long day at all, but Cisco could fall asleep like this, resting his weight against the solid support of Harry's form. But the movie will wind down shortly, and Cisco feels suddenly emboldened, after all these weeks of buildup. The atmosphere between them is easy, and though there's that slight initial nervousness that comes along with broaching the subject, he's no longer afraid.

“So, Barry reminded of something earlier that I've been thinking about,” he says, willing himself not to peek at Harry's face.

“What, that you don't know how to calculate a Lorentz force?”

“Wh- no, *shut up*, that only happened once and I was on the best painkillers in Caitlin's stash; I cannot be held responsible for anything said or done that day.” Cisco thumps his head

against Harry's shoulder and begins again. "It has come to my attention that I haven't been on a date in at least a full calendar year." He waves his arms like a conductor cutting off the orchestra, emphasizing the finality of it all.

"Are you wallowing again?" Harry asks, eying him, but Cisco shakes his head, enjoying the way Harry startles at the sensation of hair tickling his arm.

"No, I'm done with that life. No more wallows out of me. Time to be proactive. I'm going to go on a date." He pauses long enough to gather his wits and feel Harry stiffen just slightly under his cheek. "And it's going to be with you. This Friday, 7 p.m. We'll make dinner, and then I'll show you something cool. How about it?"

There's a hanging moment of uncertainty as Harry doesn't answer right away, but then the tension slowly leaves his shoulders. "Do you always take this approach when you ask someone out?"

"Only when I know they'll say yes." He chances a peek at Harry from up under his eyelashes to find him semi-smiling again.

"That's a lot of confidence in the face of someone who's seen you trap your arms in a pool noodle before."

"That's a lot of pushback from someone who was checking me out just this morning," Cisco retorts, sitting up so he can face Harry, whose eyes flit downward at the hem of his shirt for a nanosecond, before he fixes his expression.

"I told you before, it's because your shirt was untucked." It's barely an excuse and they both know it.

"My shirt is always untucked." But it isn't usually a tad too short so that it rides up when he stretches to reach the box of extra batteries on the upper shelf in the workroom. There was a sudden influx of electronics that needed new batteries after that first flashlight, but after the sixth time, Harry almost bit through the pencil whose eraser he was chewing on, so Cisco just left the box on a table for easy access. That all aside, Harry still hasn't answered, so Cisco decides for him. "So, c'mon, you and me, this Friday night. Don't wear anything too nice, we might make a mess."

"I could still say no." His tone and his posture make it abundantly clear that he isn't going to refuse. But Cisco knows all the arbitrary rules to their game, so he plays along.

"You're not going to say no. But, I guess if you *have* to decline, there's a hot firefighter I know who still has my number. He has good taste in beer, laughs at my jokes, *and* he can carry me out of a burning building. You have great arms but I don't think you could pull that off."

"I could lift you long enough for my purposes," Harry says, a hint of rasp slipping into his voice as he deliberately lets his gaze drag from Cisco's hips to the wall and back, and that's-well. That's certainly something, Cisco thinks, as a wave of heat pulses through him, though

not really the sort of something he wants to be imagining while his friends are one room away watching a family friendly film.

He swallows once, his throat painfully dry, and gestures between them meaninglessly, trying to convey who even knows what. “Um. Okay. Not that I’m turning down a demonstration, but I feel like you’re giving me mixed messages here.”

Harry’s laugh is short, but it causes his eyes to brighten. “You’re right, I’m not saying no. Can I meet you in the kitchen, or will you need time to prepare?”

“I won’t need time to like scatter rose petals all over the floor if that’s what you’re asking. The kitchen at 7 works for me.”

The movie is drawing to a close, so Harry nods, and pulls Cisco up off the floor with him when he stands. They mill about for a few seconds, Harry holding his corn chips again, trying to decide if there’s any point to sneaking back in for the very end of the film.

“They’re going to wonder why it took you so long to bring back the chips.”

“I’ll tell them you distracted me,” Harry says with a one-armed shrug, and Cisco grimaces.

“Don’t. Barry and Caitlin’ll have a field day.”

“You hardly look debauched enough for that kind of reaction. But we can fix that.” He gives Cisco a languid once-over, and Cisco throws his arms up in a blocking motion, his heart doing cartwheels again. They are doing this the *right way*, dammit. He refuses to let the team catch them canoodling in the hallway like desperate teenagers.

“Oh my god, stop going from zero to sixty like that; you’re giving me whiplash. No makeouts until after the first date, and definitely not in front of the family, jeez.” He makes a shooing gesture, herding an obstinate Harry back into the cortex in time to see the credits begin rolling. He escapes to safety next to Iris, who asks him if he’s ever read the original book, and that’s enough to distract from Barry interrogating Harry about his chips.

Okay. So he has a date with Harry now, which is great. Exceptional, really, besides the minor issue of not having prepared anything and having no backup plans to consult, but whatever, he’ll figure it out. Even half a year ago he never could have anticipated being here, but now that he is, he’s no longer overwhelmed. Everything will be fine; they’re going to have a good time. He’s got it under control.

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The funny thing about getting your shit together in time to be a normal, functioning adult is that sometimes the universe decides to gut-punch you with a stupid plot twist anyway, for no reason other than to prove that it can. At this point, every single of Team Flash has been kidnapped at least once, which doesn’t *really* make Cisco feel better about anything, but is a fun and saddening factoid to remember in times like these.

This isn't an abduction so much as it is a hostage situation, but in the end he's still trussed up with zip ties like a game bird in the basement of Mercury Labs, sitting in between Jesse and Wally in the worst third wheel situation he's ever been a part of. It's Friday just after noon, and Wally's accidentally managed to pick the most unfortunate day to finally succeed in visiting Jesse at work. Cisco was just going to drop him off after going to check out the progress on his racecar, but the temptation of seeing what shiny new tech Mercury Labs has was too strong.

"So I know no one has shittier security than STAR Labs does, but have you guys ever considered investing in some additional measures since people seem to break in so often?" Cisco whispers to Jesse, who glares at him from over her shoulder.

"The security isn't that bad! We just didn't account for someone with *telekinesis*," she mumbles back. In the storage room across the way, several of the thieves continue ransacking the shelves. From what Cisco can tell, the other scientists in the building are probably in the same situation as they are: unharmed, but incapacitated. The fates seem to have it out for Mercury Labs, but at least no one's been seriously injured this time around.

"Your dad didn't have telekinesis, and he managed to break in anyway," Cisco says, and Jesse sighs. On Cisco's other side, Wally cranes his neck around to try and see what the thieves are up to.

"What are they after? Any way you can contact Barry?" Wally asks, but Cisco shakes his head.

"Not since they took our phones. I could try to vibe to him, but there was an attempted breakout at Iron Heights this morning, and I think he's still there on Flash business right now. Probably not the best idea to pop my head in over there." Cisco knows it'll hit the news soon enough that criminals have broken into Mercury Labs, but Barry might not hear about it until it's too late. The thieves don't seem intent on hurting anyone, so currently it might be best to let them do their thing and hunt them down afterwards.

"The cops should be on their way anyway. There's a panic button in the central security room; someone's bound to have set it off," Jesse reassures them.

"I think somebody's coming back out," Wally says, stretching forward to peek again. "He's rolling this big pointed cannon--"

"Oh, crap," Jesse groans. Wally turns away from the window to look back at her, alarmed.

"What does it do? Is it dangerous?"

"It's the disintegration ray," she says, wriggling around to try and loosen the ties that have her stuck to a cabinet door.

"Like from the Looney Tunes?" Cisco asks, probably a tad more excited than he should be. "Don't tell me it disintegrates itself."

"At this point it doesn't disintegrate anything. It just sets stuff on fire."

“Huh. Not a working prototype then, gotcha.”

“Guys, another dude has...a cattle prod? And that one’s taking these fancy chrome boots,” Wally reports. “And they’re- oh, shit, they’re coming back this way.” He hunches back down close to Cisco, struggling with the cord around his wrists and the bench drawer handle. “If we could get these off, we might be able to take them...”

“Whoa, no, do not fight the scary burglars with guns. My abilities do not include healing spells, and you’re gonna give poor Joe a heart attack,” Cisco tells him. “Once they leave I’m sure I can vibe on anything they’ve touched, so let’s just sit tight and have Barry grab ‘em later.”

Which is a sound plan in theory, but two of the goons head back in their direction, a snippet of conversation growing loud enough for them to hear.

“...but we should take one of them as insurance. Just to make sure the cops don’t follow us.”

“Alright, get one of the kids. They’ll be easier to handle than anyone upstairs.”

All three of them freeze: there’s really no doubt that they’re the “kids” in question. God, Cisco is so sick of kidnappings. This is total bullshit. He exhales violently as the heavy footsteps approach them, concentrating on the plastic tie around his wrist. He’s never tried this before, but the premise should be the same as the weapon they used to take down Zoom’s surge of Earth-2 metas. All he has to do is vibrate the plastic at a different frequency...he can feel a resistance when he tries, but the structure isn’t giving way yet.

“He’s coming,” Jesse whispers, and she looks nervous. Cisco grits his teeth and pushes his vibrations harder, at a higher and higher frequency until he finally feels the tightening stress threatening to fracture the plastic. Both Jesse and Wally have already been captured by one evil megalomaniac; that’s more than enough for one lifetime. He’s not letting these knockoff rogues take either of them today.

The thief re-enters the room with a clatter, still swinging his gun around. From the way he walks and the blank squint of his gray eyes, he’s probably not the brains of the outfit, but it isn’t certain whether there really is one. These guys seem like they’re low level thugs who decided to use their newfound powers to hopefully steal something of use. It almost makes Cisco miss Rory and the Snarts. This guy isn’t massive, but he’s large enough to easily drag any of them along with him.

“Take me,” Wally snaps before the thief can reach out to Jesse. “I’ll go with you, so leave them alone.” Cisco doesn’t have time to fear for Wally and his heroically low self-preservation skills, because the thug is already grabbing Jesse by the arm.

“Nice try, kid,” he snorts, putting his gun aside to begin untying Jesse. One hand is still clamped tight around her arm, keeping her in his hold as she winces in discomfort. Her glare is downright venomous, but she doesn’t struggle. As he finishes loosening the restraint around Jesse’s hands, Cisco finally feels the plastic around his own wrists snap.

It would be smarter, maybe, to assess the situation or to try and talk their way out of this mess, but Cisco can sense the rage seeping from Wally's skin, and when he sees the first sign of real fear enter Jesse's eyes as the thief tries to yank her to her feet, he moves without thinking. The blast he releases catches Jesse's captor on his side, aimed far from her so she doesn't get hit by it. It's hard enough to send the man slamming into the lab bench across the room, but hopefully not hard enough to leave any lasting damage. Cisco doesn't want to kill the guy, just get him the hell away from Jesse, who dashes to his side after grabbing the dropped gun.

Cisco keeps a hand out, ready to strike again if needed, but the thief now lying crumpled on the floor isn't the issue. It's his companion, stepping in through the doorway and staring at the scene in confusion. As if in slow motion, he begins to lift his gun as Cisco turns his hands toward him, but before either of them can blink there's a whirl of motion and Jesse's standing several yards away from them all, trailing sparks of gold and holding the weapon she snagged right out of thief #2's hands.

"What," is all thief #2 says before Cisco sends him flying away back into the hallway. It's a stronger burst than he really wants to use, stronger than anything he's ever used on a training dummy, but they have no time – there's no way their enemies are down for the count. So it's a good thing Jesse's suddenly awoken to these long dormant speedster powers of hers. She zips over, and shoves her gun into Wally's hands before cutting him free.

"That was amazing," Wally breathes, and Jesse flushes, the stress in her posture lessening slightly. Cisco helps him to his feet, but holds one arm out, keeping himself between the two of them and their assailants as they hurriedly make their way out of the lab. Already he can tell the first man is stirring, so they need to get outside before anyone else can come after them.

"Jesse, maybe you should go on ahead and alert the cops," Cisco says as they run down the corridor, their footsteps thundering through the empty hallway. The coast seems clear, but there's at least one meta in the crew, so who knows what might lie ahead. "If you think you can carry Wally, take him with you." Cisco's odds are better if he only has to defend himself, and he'd have a lot better control if he knew both of them were already safe. But Jesse shakes her head vehemently.

"I'm not leaving anyone behind here. Anyway, you can't find your way out without me, so we have to stick together. We're almost there."

They sneak up the stairwell and stop at the door; Cisco takes the tiniest peek out, but the first floor hallway is deserted as far as he can tell, so they slip out, hurrying along to get back to the lobby. Outside, the faint sound of sirens approaches; if they can get out, they'll be home free.

Unfortunately, they're not the only ones who have heard the sirens. As they turn the corner back into the lobby, they almost run straight into a whole group of the burglars now trying to make their escape. It's utterly disorganized, but they'd still stand out too much to chance going out there, so they spin around and head for one of the emergency exits instead. They weave through the path Jesse tells them to, until they can see the fire doors that lead to the

back of the building, but luck isn't on their side today. From a storage room emerges another thief, holding a box of filled vials, and, oddly enough, wearing board shorts.

The man takes a moment to size them up, and for a second it seems like maybe they can escape a confrontation, but from outside come the unmistakable sounds of the police finally arriving on scene. It's enough to shock him into action, apparently to make a break for it, because he flings his box straight at them before extending his hand out, no doubt to use some sort of meta power.

Jesse's got the vials of unknown substance covered, using her speed to carefully snatch them out of midair, so Cisco prepares himself to blast away whatever the meta sends their way, except it turns out to be some thin, luminescent, orange liquid, what the fuck. He catches himself before he accidentally sends out a wave and sprays the substance everywhere, stumbling away just in time and pushing Wally out of harm's way. It splashes on the ground and immediately begins eroding the floor tiles.

"Disintegration spray, alright then," Cisco says numbly to himself, and shoots a wave at their assailant's legs, trying to knock him over long enough for them to make their escape. It's a successful hit, taking the man out at the knees, and sending him to the ground, but Cisco finds himself in for an extremely unpleasant surprise when a jet of orange acid sprays toward him from the exposed skin of the man's leg instead of his flailing arms. It's such a jarring sight that he doesn't think to move until it's too late.

But as much as today is a day of misfortune, it's also a day of discovery, which is why Cisco doesn't have a heart attack when he's suddenly at the far end of the hallway, being held up by Wally. He looks at the spot where he was, now starting to quickly disintegrate as the orange liquid soaks in, and back at Wally, who looks both elated and freaked out.

"You just- you've got it too?" Cisco blurts, probably more baffled than he ought to be. He should've seen this coming; both of them were caught in the same dark matter explosion, after all.

"Let's go!" Jesse shouts, placing the vials gently on the ground and gesturing frantically at the door. On the ground, the man groans and tries to sit up.

"Holy shit, does *everyone* have powers?" Cisco mutters.

"Talk later, run now!" Wally replies, looping an arm around Cisco's waist and hoisting him up, before rushing them both out the fire door, Jesse just a step behind. They stop short outside at the sight of the cops starting to gather around the building and throw their hands up.

They're escorted to a squad car by an officer, who begins questioning them about the situation inside. Jesse's still in her lab coat, with her ID readily visible, and one of the other officers recognizes Cisco as a CCPD advisor, so they're released shortly to wait a safe distance away for someone to take their statements. Joe arrives soon after, leaping out of his car, and begins looking each of them over frantically, checking for any injuries.

"Don't worry, dad, we're good," Wally assures him as he examines Jesse.

“How did you get out?” Joe asks in a hushed tone. “It was you, wasn't it, Cisco? You've really got those powers down pat now.” He clasps Cisco's shoulder, smiling at him.

“Thanks, but it definitely wasn't all me. There's something we all need to talk about later,” Cisco says as he pats Joe's hand, glancing over at the other two. Joe spots his glance and looks between them all, his guard back up again.

“Did they do anything to you?” he asks, his voice turning hard.

“It's nothing like that! We just have some news,” Jesse says hastily. “Important Flash business type news.”

That mollifies Joe enough for him to leave them with another cop so that he can head over to the scene. They promise to meet him back at the lab and he lends Jesse his phone for long enough to call Harry and stop him from launching a one-man rescue assault on the lab to save her. By the time the police are finally done with them, most of the thieves have been rounded up, and they can finally take the van home.

The second they get in the car, away from eavesdroppers, Cisco can't help but bring it up. “You two. Speedsters. That's new, right? I'm not just completely oblivious?”

“Brand new,” Wally confirms, looking between himself and Jesse, who nods.

“I always had the feeling something was different after the lightning strike, you know, with-

“-your metabolism, right.”

“-yeah, but no super speed until today.” Jesse shrugs, looking herself over.

“So, do we get suits too?” Wally asks, grinning.

“And nicknames?” Jesse adds.

“You know *I'll* say yes to both, but I think that's a conversation you'll need to have after all the tests. I'm not making the mistake of crossing either of your dads,” Cisco says, as he begins driving them back to the lab.

When they arrive in the cortex Harry, Caitlin, and Iris ambush them immediately. First comes a round of relieved hugs before chaos ensues. Cisco still doesn't get his hug from Harry, but each of the girls embrace him in turn, squeezing tight with relief, and that's comfort enough. They all fall into a frenzy of words as Caitlin tries to discuss the readings on the metahuman monitor, and Harry mutters curses darkly under his breath, and Jesse and Wally try to explain to Iris what happened at Mercury Labs while simultaneously getting a check up, so Cisco decides he'll just let them all do the talking for now.

He goes to get a lollipop and check on what Barry's up to at Iron Heights, but before long Harry slinks over and tries to direct him to the medbay.

“Your turn, c'mon,” he says, pressing gently against Cisco's back. Cisco turns to face him, but his hand remains in place, so they wind up standing in a half-embrace right up against

each other.

Cisco tilts his head back to look him in the eye. Harry looks like he hasn't slept in 36 hours, which he knows isn't the case. The hostage situation must have really gotten to him. He's probably going to put up a lot of resistance to the idea of Jesse becoming a superhero, and Cisco knows with absolute certainty that she's going to want to follow in Barry's footsteps. But hopefully that's an argument for another day.

"My turn?" he asks with a slight smile. "Nothing's different with me. Shouldn't you be concentrating your efforts on the two brand new baby speedsters over there?"

"Caitlin thinks we should give them some time to recover before we start the barrage of tests." There's a twist to his mouth, but Cisco can tell he grudgingly agrees with her. "Jesse says you almost got shot," he says, voice low and grave.

"But I didn't. She saved me. Not a scratch on me."

"At least one." Harry takes Cisco's left hand and rolls up the sleeve of his shirt, revealing the ligature marks on his wrist, along with a couple of whiplash-thin cuts in his skin. They must have come from the shattered plastic ties. In the heat of the moment, he hadn't noticed.

"Huh, didn't even see those til now," he remarks, as Harry runs his thumb softly over the darkening bruises. It doesn't hurt, it only leaves a frisson of sensitivity rippling across his arm. "Sooo, guess who can explode stuff with his mind now?" Cisco uses his free hand to point his thumb at himself.

Harry looks vaguely excited even as his brow furrows. "You literally just said nothing was different with you. This seems like a major oversight."

"I mean, it's really just an extension of the powers I already had. Okay, and 'explode' isn't quite the right word for it, and the only 'stuff' I've tried it on was a zip tie, but I get the general principle. I should be able to modify the ability to apply to anything. Not that I really want to," he says, frowning. He remembers word for word what Reverb said he could do, and that just doesn't jibe with what Cisco stands for. It's almost too powerful of a weapon to keep in his arsenal, but he supposes it might be useful for situations like today's.

Harry nods slowly, understanding his hesitation. He brushes the pad of his finger over the nicks in Cisco's wrist once more, and then turns to start pushing him toward the others.

"Show me later. Caitlin wants you now."

Cisco goes in for his checkup to appease them, but as expected nothing of interest is found. They all return to the main room of the cortex to recount the day's events as they wait for Joe and Barry to return. By the time Barry gets in after finishing up work at the CCPD, it's early evening. Joe is still tied up with paperwork and won't be able to join them until later, so Iris goes to order pizza for everyone, since no one seems up for leaving tonight.

Barry catches hold of Cisco as he's headed out to wait for the delivery to arrive. Why they didn't just send Barry to go pick it up is a mystery, but whatever, they've all had a long day.

“Hey, heard you were the big hero today,” Barry says, grinning brightly at him. Cisco blinks back and then ducks his head.

“Me? I mean, I'll take credit for knocking some guys over, but it was a team effort. Jesse and Wally each had to rescue me.”

“Okay, you're all heroes then. Nothing wrong with depending on a friend. And I know you worry about overdoing it with your powers, but Joe told me everyone you hit today was fine. A little banged up, but nothing serious, just some bruises,” Barry tells him, throwing an arm around his shoulder amicably.

“Oh, cool. I couldn't tell how hard my wave was so that's good to know. I'll remember for next time.” He hadn't realized it was still weighing on his mind until now. He feels a little less exhausted with the knowledge that he has enough control not to run wild and hurt people by accident. All his training is paying off.

“Think you would ever want to come out in the field with me?”

Cisco considers the idea briefly. It would be great, of course, to be of more help to the city, but he's still not sure he's ready to be out in the front lines. Maybe in the near future he can try to help on some smaller missions, to be sure he has enough self-discipline not to accidentally make a mess of everything. “And make a crime fighting duo? I think you'll have your hands full for a while with your new protégés.”

“That's exactly why I need you! You can help me keep those two in line. They kind of respect you, and kind of respect me, so with our powers combined we make one pretty good mentor out of two mediocre ones.”

Cisco laughs, and sticks Barry in the side with his elbow. “Watch who you're calling mediocre. Someone said I was the big hero today. Anyway, I'm gonna be busy for a while, designing those suits, but yeah, maybe in the future I'll come along.”

It isn't until Cisco's taking a bite out of his pizza that he remembers what day it is, what time it is, and more specifically, what should be occurring right about now. He stops still, slice of pizza still in hand and resting in his mouth, and swivels around to look at Harry, who's speaking to Joe. The psychic bond must still be going strong, because he glances up the second Cisco lays his eyes on him. Cisco knows he must look like a fool with pizza hanging from his mouth and his eyes round and guilty, but Harry huffs, quietly amused, and makes a looping motion with his hand, before returning his attention to Joe. Cisco finally takes his bite, chewing slowly as he mulls over what that gesture means. Again? Retry?

“But why are there so many lemons in the fridge? Is that a Flash thing? Should I start stocking them too?” Wally scoots his chair toward the pizza boxes, but Iris lifts one foot and plants it squarely on the edge of his seat, pushing him back away.

“It's really, really not,” she laughs. “They're Cisco's. Most stuff in the fridge is usually his.” Cisco stops zoning out at his pizza when he feels them staring at him in expectation.

“Oh, yeah, I was gonna make a batch of lavender lemonade today. Tomorrow, I'll show you, if you're free. I've got a killer recipe,” he responds, distracted by the thought of the ingredients he bought for tonight.

“You okay, man? You look out of it.” Wally rolls closer to Cisco, nudging him with his knee. “Maybe you should go to sleep early tonight. Thanks for the save, by the way.” It's most strikingly apparent to Cisco that Iris and Wally are siblings when he sees them smiling; they share the same irrepressible glow. He can't help but grin back whenever he sees it.

“Same to you. An acid bath is something I could live without ever experiencing.”

Iris pulls a face as she rips a piece from her pizza crust. “Me too.”

“But enough about gross acid guy. How's your article on that pharmaceutical scandal going?”

Iris lights up and launches into an explanation of her investigation so far. Tonight's date drifts to the back of his mind, temporarily forgotten as they talk, until about an hour and a half later, when he somehow winds up standing alone next to Harry, while swirling his flat soda around in his cup, waiting for Jesse to come back. Caitlin had stolen Iris from him about ten minutes ago, and Joe had gone somewhere to take a call, but he's not sure how exactly they wound up like this again.

It's not awkward or anything, but that only means Cisco's instincts tell him to talk until it does become awkward, so he's keeping his mouth shut for now.

After stealing Cisco's cup to examine the contents, and deeming it undrinkable, Harry puts his hands on his hips and asks, “Do you really need *twenty-three* lemons to make lemonade?”

Cisco throws his hand up in the air. “Why is it that everyone comments on the lemons? Maybe I thought you would be extremely thirsty and I wanted to be prepared.”

“That's not the reason.”

“It could be,” Cisco protests. “I'm a very considerate boyfriend.” To prove his point, he takes the empty plate from Harry's hand and crumples it up, tossing it at the trash bin. He squawks when he misses, and dashes over to chuck it out.

Harry grins crookedly at him as he scurries back. Reaching out, he flips back a strand of Cisco's hair that's fallen out of place. “I'm sure you are.” His hand lingers for but a second before he draws it away, his smile fading into something more solemn. “I'm sorry about what happened today, but I'm grateful that you were there for Jesse. Thank you for helping her.”

“Hey, no prob, I wasn't just gonna let them grab her if I could stop it. We all look out for each other, remember?”

“I know it's second nature to you to try and protect those you care about, but I'm thankful regardless. And thank you for coming back home.”

It's a strange sentiment, made stranger by the way Harry is looking at him, as if he's yet again trying to find something. Cisco's seen it enough times since Harry's return, but he still doesn't

know what it means. He wonders abruptly if it's a remnant from his B1 life, if Harry's thinking about something that he no longer remembers, and he's gripped with the suddenly pressing need to understand.

"Of course I came back. I always do," he says, as he tries to read Harry's expression, but he doesn't stumble upon any epiphanies. He won't find any answers like this.

Harry tracks Jesse zipping across the cortex to Barry and Iris as he answers. "Good. Should we reschedule our date? You can bring as many lemons as you want next time; I won't complain. Much." There's a low key rush of relief that Harry brings up the date first, apparently still interested despite all the trouble.

"That's really noble of you. Same time next week?"

"Sure. Same place?"

Cisco almost confirms it, but then he thinks about how much time they already spend in the lab, and changes his mind. "Nah, meet me in the parking lot. I'll take you out dancing. You can finally show me your so-called moves."

"Even if I were only half as good as I am, you would still be impressed. You're very easily dazzled," Harry teases and Cisco bumps him with his shoulder, rolling his eyes.

"After talking yourself up so much, you better follow through."

They collectively wrap up dinner not long after, and Cisco turns down Barry's offer (and Jesse and Wally's as well) to bring him home, since he drove to work today. He has to stop by CCPD tomorrow morning anyway to drop off his new prototype riot shield before he can help with the tests they're going to start running at the lab. He bids the others goodnight and heads to his car, walking briskly to avoid the mosquitos hanging around in the late summer air.

He's putting the shield in the trunk when he hears footsteps crossing the lot; after the shield is safely stowed he walks around to find Harry leaning against the driver's seat door.

"What's up? Did I leave anything behind?" he asks, but Harry shakes his head minutely.

"I believe I owe you something," Harry says, holding his arms out like he's about to give a sermon. When Cisco continues to stare skeptically at him, he releases a puff of breath and advances on him, arms still outstretched. "Do you want your hug or not?"

Cisco's eyes barely have a chance to widen in delight before he launches himself forward. "Hell yeah, I do! Get over here, Harry."

They meet halfway, Cisco looping his arms around Harry's waist while Harry's hands rest on his back. He closes his eyes in order to soak the moment in, but shuts them open again when he notices how rigid and carefully still Harry is under his touch.

"This feels awkward," Cisco says, disappointed. "Like we're processing a transaction." He squeezes experimentally, but halts when he recalls that his forearm is pressing directly over a

scar he knows Harry has curving up toward his ribcage from an old accident. He adjusts the position of his arms, but it doesn't help, so he settles them in the least uncomfortable position, his shoulders stiff.

"It would be vastly less awkward if you stop tensing up like I'm going to suplex you." Sure, Harry says that, but he's the one still embracing Cisco like he's made of sugar and glass, all translucent fragility and cut edges.

"I can't help it! It's just so artificial. This is not a natural hug. I don't get it – I know you're capable of doing better than this; we've hugged before." He had never actually forgotten – how could he – but he doesn't think back to those days much. They were too fresh of a reminder of Barry's decision and of his own mortality. But it had been a good hug, even with Cisco's head still spinning and Harry gripping a tad too hard.

"What if you're the problem? Did you ever consider that?" But his hold relaxes, falling into an easier embrace, allowing Cisco to tighten his grip too.

Cisco pulls back long enough to show Harry the dismissive look on his face, before snuggling against Harry's chest again. It's all hard planes and the jut of collarbone, but the sensation is welcoming in its familiarity, even if it isn't soft. "I guarantee I'm not the problem. There's only one solution to this, you know. We'll have to keep hugging until you improve."

"That's the only solution?" He can feel the rumble of Harry's laugh from where they're pressed together. It travels like one of his shockwaves through his chest, leaving him warm, full of static electricity.

"The only solution." Cisco releases Harry and steps back to lean against his car. "Any reason you finally let me cash in my IOU?"

Harry slides his hands in his pockets as he slowly backs away, but he doesn't answer at once. The silence stretches on long enough that Cisco almost backtracks to make a joke and play it off like it doesn't matter, but Harry finally speaks, his quiet voice carrying through the evening air without resistance.

"I needed to know that you were real. That you had really come back to me safely and in one piece."

And yet again, that look, caught somewhere between yearning and desperate curiosity, but altogether too vulnerable. Cisco knows for sure now that he's forgotten something he shouldn't have, something that happened before the first hug they ever shared. Some thread of his former life that Harry's entangled in, that he needs to recover if he ever wants to understand. This goes beyond simple worry from their day to day occupational hazards. This fear runs deeper than he can grasp, so he does the only thing he can.

Cisco gestures toward himself, calling Harry back over, and envelops him in another hug once he's in reaching distance. This time, he doesn't think or hesitate. He wraps his arms around Harry and holds on tight, letting the echoing resonance of his heartbeat speak for him.

Harry is still too careful with him, but he accepts the hug more easily this time, allowing Cisco to fit against him comfortably.

"I told you, you don't have to worry about that. Hear this now: I will always come for you," he mumbles into Harry's chest.

"*The Princess Bride*?" Harry asks, and Cisco shouldn't be surprised that he recognizes the quotation. Maybe he shouldn't have gone with a film they watched just days before. But if Harry remembers what line follows next, he doesn't comment.

Cisco finally pulls away, but leaves his hands gripping Harry by the forearms as he speaks. "I know I'm not as charismatic as Cary Elwes, but you get what I mean. I'll always find my way back home."

Here, under the rapidly dwindling light of sunset, the shadows slip seamlessly around them. Harry is but a step away, and yet Cisco is inexplicably reminded of seeing him through the filter of his other self's memories: heartbreakingly familiar and infinitely distant.

"I'm going to hold you to that," Harry says softly.

"Fine by me." It's the best reassurance he can give. Cisco has died more than his fair share of times, but beneath his optimism and bright disposition, he knows how to survive. He can promise that much. "So are we okay? Am I real enough for you?" It's an inversion of that night they spent in the lab, with Harry trying to tether Cisco down to the present again, away from his vibes.

Harry takes a measured breath, tilting his head and casting his gaze downwards when he takes Cisco's hand, so that his eyes are obscured from view as he traces the now faded lines cut into his wrists from the plastic ties. His touch lingers right above the vein, waiting until he feels two, three heartbeats pass by.

"Real enough."

He lets go, leaving the heat signature of his touch behind. His face is still pensive, still not quite settled, but he feels grounded again, somewhere within Cisco's reach. But he draws back.

"Goodnight then, Cisco."

As Harry steps away to return to the lab, Cisco is seized with the need to ask, before the moment escapes. He needs to know what he's missing.

Why do you look at me like that? Like you're searching for an answer? As if I'm an unknown variable, as if there's some uncertainty about me, when you should know there's nothing more certain in the universe than my constancy?

Why do you look at me like you've already lost me?

He wants so desperately to ask, but he knows that he should already know. Asking would only make the issue worse. He needs to go back to the beginning and find out for himself, so

he doesn't stop Harry, not tonight. He bids his farewell, he gets in his car, and he watches Harry return to the lab before he drives home to a night of restless sleep.

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He needs to know.

It hasn't left his mind for the three days since, and he's finally decided that he needs to vibe in order to figure it out. He's gotta track the change back to its source. Whatever happened must have gone down before the timeline was reverted, so he has no choice but to dive back into his B1 life to get to the bottom of things. He has the most trouble remembering the end, for some reason. Probably because being thrown back into his original body had been such a shock: one moment he'd been sitting in Harry's lab, the next, he was collapsed on the Wests' living room floor, his face wet with his own blood as Barry tore back into the house and everyone else was crowding him in frantic concern. He's going to have to intentionally vibe those memories back, since he's suppressed them too well.

It's been nothing but an endless stream of tests for Wally and Jesse for the last few days, but in between all the running and recordings and hustle he gets his chance mid-afternoon. Left hanging on the arm of one of the chairs is Harry's hoodie, the same one he was wearing when Jay Garrick helped him tear open a portal back to B1 Earth-1. Cisco can remember glimpses of that night, but not enough from his dreams to recall anything clearly, so he swipes Harry's sweatshirt from the chair to help him focus.

"I need to borrow this." He waves the bundle of cloth at Harry as they exit the cortex. Harry looks up from his tablet to study him quizzically.

"Why? For science?"

"No, for warmth, you weirdo. The AC is too strong for me," he lies glibly. To keep up appearances, he shrugs it on, rolling up the sleeves so that they don't dangle past his wrists. When he's done adjusting the cuffs, he glances up to find Harry trying to bore a hole through him using his vision.

Cisco tugs at the collar of the hoodie, watching the way Harry squirms. Interesting. Is this a thing for him? It seems like it might be a thing. "What?"

"Nothing," Harry growls and power-walks away.

Cisco files away that information for later use and follows him out. He continues wearing the sweatshirt for the rest of the day, and absconds with it that evening before Harry can demand it back. He'd thought about asking Jesse for her jacket as well, but he decided it might be excessive to sleep in a nest made of other people's clothes for his experiment, especially since he isn't even sure this will work.

He's been having less and less trouble with vibe dreams as his control has increased and with the help of his friends, and he thinks he'll have his best chance to get an extended look at his other life in his sleep, but without something to concentrate on, who knows what he'll be reliving. That's why he folds Harry's hoodie neatly into a square and leaves it beside his

pillow, feeling a little skeezy about the situation. He'll explain tomorrow when he returns it, but for now he needs it to tether him to the approximate date that he wants.

Leaving one hand on the shirt, Cisco falls asleep, mind already drifting. He flits in and out of a few different scenes – his father handing him another book to read while Cisco waits for his blood to be drawn again; watching the news in the back of the shop and studying the face of young, already weary Detective West, who answers the reporter in curt sentences, her face never changing from its fixed sternness; Barry, rocking nervously back and forth on his heels in front of Cisco's door with his hands buried in his pockets, and the dazzling elation in his smile when Cisco greets him again for the first time in fifteen years – until he's stumbling out of a breach with Barry and Jay into one of the sleek, well-lit rooms of Earth-2's STAR Labs. Jesse bolts forward to greet them, while Harry, his hands covered in grease and face drawn and haggard, hangs back for several seconds to learn Cisco's new appearance, his new self.

Cisco takes a hesitant step forward, but before he can settle in, the memory shifts again, and he's sitting at a lab bench in a different room, the waste bin next to him half full with bloody paper towels. There's a glass of water in front of him and behind his left eye he can feel the continual throb of pain. Jesse is curled up in a ball and asleep in a chair, and Barry and Jay are nowhere to be seen. It takes a moment, but he begins to recall what's happening. They'd just tried to restore Barry's speed again, sending him to commune with the speedforce or whatever it is that speedsters do to get their powers back. Shortly afterward, Cisco's body had decided to have another go at terminating itself, but it had been a weak-hearted attempt, giving him an intensely bloody nose at worst.

Rattling at several different rhythms comes Harry, laden with about five different pill bottles, which he deposits on the bench. He extends one to Cisco, who feels himself speaking involuntarily along with the vibe.

"I told you before, I'm fine. It's not going to last much longer, anyway." His voice isn't sharp, exactly, but it's hard in a way Cisco isn't used to. Resigned. The line between memory and his outside perspective blurs, and he surrenders himself to following along with his past self, soaking in every emotion he'd felt before.

He knows Harry is dissecting his every move, and he's too tired to be annoyed by it, but neither does he feel like sitting still to be examined in silence like some sort of lab animal. So he meets Harry's gaze head on, and whatever it is Harry sees in his eyes makes him frown. Cisco takes a vicious triumph in that, especially in the bemusement that Harry can't quite contain when he comments, "You're...different."

"Ladies and gentlemen, one of the sharpest minds of his generation," Cisco jeers, sweeping his arm in Harry's direction. "What could have possibly given it away?"

"You have the same smart mouth, that's for sure." Harry sits across from him, still watching him from narrowed eyes behind his glasses. He still looks exhausted, and Cisco feels a twinge of worry, followed by a itching irritation that he cares so much. "The same face, obviously, and the same mannerisms; you should be just like him, but..."

"But I'm not. Now you know what that feels like. Jarring, isn't it?" Cisco props his elbow up on the bench, leaning into his hand as he stares back, unflinching. He knows he looks like a

mess, loose strands of hair falling free from his ponytail, and his sweater ill-fitting on his thin frame. Barry hadn't commented on it, but it had been evident from his expression that something about Cisco unsettled him. Too much steel in his eyes, his smile too bitter and his hands unsteady.

There's no doubt that Harry feels the difference just as acutely. "Very much so," he says. But he continues to study Cisco, as if he can solve his personality somehow if he stares long enough.

"What? Too moody for you? Not docile enough? Not *smart* enough?" Cisco knows that without the years of hands-on experience, he comes off as less bright than his counterpart, but Harry shakes his head at each suggestion.

"No. Those changes are minimal. He was never tame as he looked, and you're clearly still as clever as he was, though perhaps with fewer practical skills; you knew exactly what I was doing earlier, even without my explanation. No, it's something else." He glances aside, reminiscing about someone who no longer exists, who ceased to exist when Cisco first collapsed all those years ago. "You don't...you don't have the same vibrancy. He was vivacious. Alive."

That surprises a laugh out of Cisco, and the sound must be sharper than what Harry's used to, but it's enough to knock the other man off-balance, his hands clenching and unclenching reflexively. "Alright, you've got me there. I'm not exactly the embodiment of vitality. Hard to keep up when you've got as many problems as I do." It's difficult to imagine being even half as dynamic as his counterpart, not when he's grown up with blood on his teeth and all the wrong frequencies singing through his nerve endings. Not when he's always one unlucky break away from death. Cisco hasn't known how to be *alive* in eons: his very existence is a constant exercise in relentless tenacity against everything in the universe that demands he finally let go and allow himself to fade. So, no, Cisco isn't vibrant by any means, and he is *so damn tired*, but this is his life, the one he has to make do with, and he's learned to persist.

"Barry should have known," Harry says abruptly, standing up and pacing across to the wall and back. "It's been barely a few months since this last happened, and he's already forgotten what happens when he screws around with time?"

"Even if he did know, it wouldn't have mattered. We're here anyway." Cisco chuckles again, humorlessly, wondering if Barry's recovered his speed yet. Wondering if he'll finally have learned his lesson this time around.

"Well, the happy news is that you won't have to put up with this for much longer. You can go back to your old life." Harry says it like it's supposed to be some sort of consolation, and it rankles at Cisco, compounding every bit of resentment that's been building for years, that currently overshadows any affection he has for these people that were never his to care about. He doesn't know why exactly this sets him off, but the explosion had been imminent, only waiting on a trigger, and this was it: just another reminder that Cisco can never escape himself and the living ghosts that haunt him, no matter how much he tries to ignore them.

There's no longer any trace of amusement when he speaks; there's nothing but a blunt chilliness in his voice. "It was never my old life. It doesn't count as mine when all it ever did

was slowly drive me over the edge. And you know what? I might have all your Cisco's memories, but I'm glad I never had to experience his life firsthand. I know I deserve better than this, but I also deserve better than what he got." His volume is amping up with each word, and Harry pauses in his pacing to watch him, but he can't stop the torrent of anger that's finally breaking free.

"I deserve better than a best friend who would throw me away – who would discard my friendship, not to mention his relationship with his foster family, with the love of his life – to make the same selfish decision he should know by now he doesn't have the right to make. You think I would be *happy* to go back to a life where my parents don't remember my existence, and the first person who ever treated me like I was worth something, who finally recognized how fucking *brilliant* I am, literally ripped my heart in two?

"Should I be *grateful* I get to return to a timeline where people are going to continue manipulating me and using me for their own convenience? Where the only reason I matter is because of the things I create and the powers that I have, and not because of who I am? Your Cisco might have been vibrant – he might have been dynamic and radiant and alive – but he was damaged in a way that even I've never been, despite everything else that's happened to me. Your timeline did that to him, and you helped."

Through Cisco's entire diatribe Harry's been remaining carefully neutral, but he gives a start at that last sentence, as if he's been slapped. He sounds tense as he insists, "You know I'm not him- I'm not that Wells. Or Thawne, or whoever. I would never-"

With a snort, Cisco sits up straight in his chair and spits back, "Who are you trying to convince here, Harry? Sure, you never murdered us, but that's not setting the bar very high, is it? You left plenty of scars behind anyhow." Almost everyone did, but Cisco had loved them anyway, because they were all he had.

"Look, whatever it is I did, I'm sure-"

"Don't play dumb. It's embarrassing. Like I'm supposed to believe you didn't know any better? Your Cisco might have moved on – he might have been able to forgive the fact that you treated him like shit for no reason other than because you could, because you needed someone to take out your misplaced anger on, someone to feel superior to.

"Sure, maybe you learned to play nice afterwards, but that doesn't change the fact that you were horrible to him, and that you've never once apologized for it. He let it go, because that's what he does. He forgives the people who hurt him, again and again, the people he still loves regardless, but I'm not him. I've had years to relive all the worst moments of his life, and I don't have the patience or kindness in me to overlook everything that you've all done to us."

Cisco doesn't know when he started standing, or when Harry came so close, but his hands are clutching at the edge of the bench and his breath has grown ragged. His headache continues to hammer at his skull, but he feels almost relieved, now that the last of his words have finished spilling out.

Once Harry is sure the storm of Cisco's anger has died down, he takes one step even closer, his voice gravelly as he says, "You're right. I was an asshole, I treated you poorly, and you

deserve an apology. I'm sorry."

The laugh that bursts out from Cisco is an ugly sound, edging on hysterical. "So *now* you're conveniently sorry? After everything, you've finally had a change of heart?"

Harry doesn't flinch at Cisco's tone, shrapnel-sharp and malicious, but neither does he advance any further. "Convenient or not, it's the truth. I should have told you before I left. No, I should have said something long before that, but I was holding onto my pride, and you- *he* had seemed to be over it. So I let it go, and I'm sorry for that too. For not noticing how you felt."

Why is he being so obliging? Why, after all this time? His voice is almost gentle, and Cisco *hates* that he finds it soothing. He shouldn't be so easily affected by someone he's never actually known; none of these memories even belong to him, not where it counts. But he's been reliving the fractured pieces of his other life for long enough that he's already inherited too many emotions and complications.

Half of him wants to accept the apology, and wants to believe that Harry sincerely wants to make reparations, but that's the half that's tainted by sentimentality for things that were never his. The other part of him stubbornly reaches down and refuses to be moved. "Careful, Harry. Keep talking like that and I might actually start to think you care."

That garners more of a reaction than expected; Harry expression goes from closed-off to aggravated. "You should already know that I care," he says, something dark and urgent about his demeanor.

But now Cisco's playing to hurt, ignoring the way Harry seems genuinely agitated by his accusations. He dredges up any memory he can find, anything that still aches that he can use as a weapon. "Really? Because I have plenty of memories that prove otherwise. You certainly didn't care enough not to use my trauma against me. You didn't care when I almost died at the hands of a serial killer here on Earth-2, and you *didn't care enough not to leave*."

Finally, he must hit a nerve, because Harry storms forward, snarling, "You didn't ask me to stay! You let me go, but I *came back* for you the moment you asked. I came back because *you* asked me to. Do you think I would have done that for just *anyone*?"

No? Maybe? God, Cisco doesn't know, and he doesn't know if he wants to unpack all the implications behind that, so he continues snipping back, because it's easier than trying to solve this puzzle of a man he has no hope of understanding. "Are you really telling me you wouldn't have done the same if Caitlin or Joe asked? Because even I know you're not that kind of man."

Those blue eyes are electric as they pierce through Cisco's straining defenses. "Of course I would have, but you don't- I watched you *die*, do you understand? I watched as your heart failed, I watched you choke on your last breath while I reached out for you, but you were already unraveling, and I couldn't stop it. I couldn't even bring you across to us where you might have been safe." Anger gives way to regret, and Harry seems suddenly older, more run down and ragged, and it hurts to take in. He drags his hand over his face, rubbing against his bloodshot eyes.

"I have slept for a total of seven hours over the last three days," he continues, now subdued. Cisco feels unbalanced, unsure of how to handle the pang of his heart when he hears the quiet guilt that Harry can't hide. "We needed to make sure Jay's speed was high enough to open a breach, we needed to locate the right place to find you, and to have everything prepared to help Barry- you know I would have done the same for any of them, but for *you*- I knew time wasn't on our side; I knew we would have to hurry.

"I know I was callous toward you, and there's no excuse for that, not anymore. I never made amends for that, and maybe my actions never spelled it out clearly enough, but you *are* important to me. Maybe you still think I'm heartless, but I wouldn't jump across universes for just anybody. I wouldn't go to these lengths to help someone who meant nothing to me, so don't think for a second that I don't care."

He stops with a cut-off breath, as if there's something more he needs to say, but he doesn't know the words. He doesn't break eye contact, and the look on his face is hazily familiar; Cisco has to fight his instinct to retreat from that imploring gaze. It's too much. All this emotion from someone that, even now, he doesn't totally understand his feelings for. He knew it wouldn't be easy to meet anyone from his former life, but Harry, his memory tied up with events and relationships beyond his control, is more confusing than most, especially when he looks at Cisco like that.

"Doubt thou the stars are fire," Cisco mutters, caught between the knowledge gained from endless reruns of his counterpart's life, and the intensity of Harry's fervor. After all these years, he thinks he knows what that look means, but he's overcome from seeing it in person.

It's meaningless, he thinks, even as his heart jumps. *None of those feelings are for me, and none of my feelings are really mine*, and it *is* meaningless, but what he thinks doesn't much matter, does it? He's not long for this world; once Barry returns, he'll be scrapped like an old prototype, his existence forgotten. He doesn't know what his counterpart wants, but it can't be too far off from what he himself is looking for. To be happy, to be respected, to be loved. And if he can make those things happen, perhaps it would be worth leaving this life behind for his.

So he takes a long breath to dispel the remaining agitation in him, studying the face of the man who might have loved him in another life.

"Then prove it. Show you care. Go back to Earth-1 and set things right, after Barry rewrites the timeline." It's not quite a challenge; Cisco says it more gently than he has anything else today, but Harry turns away, finally averting his eyes.

"It's not that simple. I have responsibilities to my lab and the city, and Jesse wants to remain here. Besides, I don't know that I have a place with them anymore, now that all the trouble with Zoom is over."

"You know that's not true. They'd welcome you back in a heartbeat." Harry's mouth flattens like he's not willing to seriously consider it, so Cisco asks what he really wants to know. "If he had asked, would you have stayed?"

Harry gives him a sidelong glance, before answering tersely, "I don't know. Perhaps. But he didn't, and I'm not going to waste my time thinking about hypotheticals." He turns sharply to

pick up the screwdriver he left on the table, fiddling with it to release some of the tension still running through him.

Cisco sighs, collapsing back against the lab bench because somehow he's taken a shine to the one person as emotionally stunted as Cisco is emotionally confused. "You know what the worst part of all this is?" he asks rhetorically, looking across the room at Jesse, who shifts in her sleep. There's an involuntary surge of relief to see her safe, out of harm's way. It's a small comfort compared to everything else. Even now, he can't help but wish Joe were alive and Iris hadn't grown so cold. He wishes he knew why Caitlin restarted her life in Starling City, and that Barry's happiness was worth the price the rest of them paid. He wishes he could have lived without the constant reminder of how much he missed them all. Wistfully he tells Harry, "Everyone he loved, I loved too. I could never help it." In the periphery of his vision he can see Harry fall still.

He returns his attention to Harry, ignoring the reflexive hitch in his breath when their eyes meet. "And despite it all, I know he still cared about you. But he never saw the way you looked at him. The way you look at me when you forget who I am. So trust me when I say the only reason he didn't ask was because he didn't think he could. You were never ours to keep, and even if you were...no one stays forever. So he let you go. He wanted you to be happy. Guess he didn't realize that you were happiest on Earth-1.

"Look. You don't have to go back. I don't care either way; I've got probably five hours left until I kick the bucket. But I think he'd like to see you again, even if you can't stay." He offers the best smile he can muster, wan and crooked, but maybe it's a close enough facsimile, because it causes Harry's posture to soften.

There's a tick or two of silence before Harry drops the screwdriver back onto the bench, nodding with a gradually lessening reluctance. "When it's all over – once the timeline is fixed, and we get Jay back to his Earth – when you think the time is right, open a breach for me, and I'll come back. For a visit," he says, and that's enough of a promise for the future that Cisco's smile brightens faintly.

"I can do that," he starts to respond, but he's interrupted by what feels like his heart rupturing under his ribcage. Pain splinters outward as his lungs burn and he stumbles forward, unable to catch himself before heading straight for the lab's reflective white floors, now speckled with a drop or two of red. His vision is swimming and he can't sense much besides his own blood and the sound of Harry running over and Jesse's voice piercing through the haze, but it's enough to shake Cisco out from his vibe, consciousness beginning to pulse back in and out of his memory-dream.

Desperately, he tries to cling to the scene, but the best he can do is carry himself into the vision that floats him in, this one fuzzier at the edges, though he isn't sure if it's because he's losing his grip on the vibe, or because his other self is about to pass out. He's sitting against the wall, pressing a towel to his face, though the sluggish blood flow doesn't seem to be stopping.

Barry is crouched before him, both distraught and coursing with a spectacular energy that Cisco never thought he'd get to experience in person. "I'm gonna fix this, just hold on for another second, okay?" Barry whispers, and Cisco pats him weakly on the arm.

“Do your thing. I’ll see you on the other side,” Cisco says. His last words to a best friend he never had. Barry gives him one more parting glance, then nods at Harry, before taking off through the breach Jay left for him. There’s a kind of beauty in the sight, and Cisco feels a small amount of regret that he only gets to see Barry’s speed up close this once.

“Cisco,” Harry says softly from his right. A pale hand reaches out and takes the soaked towel from his hand, replacing it with a clean one, but Cisco pushes it away. “It’s not too late for the anesthetic; I can go get it for you,” Harry offers insistently.

Cisco laughs wetly, dropping off into a cough. He never had any real access to his powers, since he technically hasn’t received them yet, but he thinks he can feel his own frequency starting to fluctuate. It won’t be long now. “Barry might be out of practice, but he’s not *that* slow. You’ve never pitied me before; don’t start now. It’s not like I haven’t been dying for the last fifteen years. I’m just finally giving in.”

“Is there anything you need?” Harry asks, refusing to budge from Cisco’s side. Jesse’s in the next room over; Cisco hadn’t wanted her to see him like this, with the translucency setting into his flesh, as Barry’s actions begin taking effect. He’s not in pain anymore.

With one hand, he swipes away at the blood trickling down onto his lip, leaving a crimson smear across his skin, and with the other he tugs his hair free from its tie and slumps his head against the wall. He lists off to one side, but Harry corrects him, still solid to the touch even as Cisco fades. They make eye contact again, and Cisco sends one last half-smile his way.

“Go home, Harry. Go back home to Earth-1, to the people that are willing to call you their family, and become a better man. Be the person they think you can be, that I know you can be, ‘kay? I’ll see you again,” he mumbles. Something like sleep pulls at him, and he begins to follow.

“Cisco, stay with me. Cisco, please,” Harry says, but it’s too late.

The vibe dissipates, leaving Cisco lying only partially under his covers with one leg hanging off his bed, feeling shell-shocked by how much he’d forgotten. He has to take a minute to readjust to this space, to reach out and feel the shape of Earth-1 rippling around him. The afterimage of STAR Labs remains, and the phantom sense of blood in the air slowly fades as he stares at the surviving glow-in-the-dark plastic stars he stuck on his ceiling a few years ago. His hand is tangled up in the sleeve of the hoodie, and his pulse thumping from stress, but the light on his curtains is only the dim glow of the sky before dawn, so he squeezes his eyes shut to try and get some actual rest before morning breaks. His plan was a success, but he feels more exhausted than ever, both emotionally and physically. For good measure, he places the hoodie out of reach. He’s had enough reminiscing for one night.

There’s a lot he needs to talk to Harry about when he wakes again.

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After Cisco explains the new features of his riot shield he added to incorporate the CCPD’s feedback, Joe takes it to go show the rest of the metahuman task force.

“This looks good, Cisco. Nice work; the team’ll love it,” Joe says, hiking the shield under his arm. Before he goes, he claps a hand to Cisco’s shoulder, asking with mild concern, “You getting enough sleep? Don’t let Wally and Jesse burn you out.”

“Yeah, I’m good. You know me; I stayed up too late again yesterday,” Cisco replies, even as he yawns.

“Alright, but don’t overwork yourself.”

Cisco watches as Joe chuckles and begins to walk away. After yesterday night, with his return to a world that lost Joe West too soon, he’s intensely glad in this moment to see Joe in good health and alive, and before he can overthink it, he blurts out, “Hey, stay safe out there, y’hear? I’m making lemon meringue pie later, and I’ll need you to taste test it first for me.”

Joe points at him as he walks away backwards. “Save me the first slice. Actually, put one aside for Iris too. Last time Barry ate her cream puffs I didn’t hear the end of it from them for a week.”

“Hide the pie from Barry, got it,” Cisco laughs and waves him farewell.

He spends the ride back to STAR Labs lost in thought, trying to come to terms with the anger that he’d been carrying inside himself. It had been real, and it had been justified, but he also remembers enough of his B1 life to know it hadn’t been only the bad memories that haunted him. He’d been just as affected by the happy memories: the ones that reminded him of what he was missing out on without any of his friends in his life anymore. He knows they *do* care about him; they’ve proved so more than enough times, especially in the last year, but without actually living through it, his B1 self hadn’t been able to clearly see that, and his resentment had grown as a result. Returning to the other timeline put in stark relief just how much he missed them.

More than anything, Cisco’s vibe fills him with the need to go check on everyone, even though he only saw them each a day or two ago. He’s not going to go bother Iris or Jesse at work, but he does swing by the cortex on his way to find Harry. Caitlin is sitting with Wally, showing him something on a chart and waving an energy bar around, while Barry spins lazily around in a chair, reading a copy of today’s Central City Picture News.

Cisco walks up behind him and tips the edge of the paper up so he can see which article Barry’s reading. “It’s the pharmaceutical story Iris was working on,” Barry tells him proudly, and Cisco grins at how obviously smitten he sounds. He’s sure the article is fine work, like usual, but Barry makes it seem even more exciting.

“I’ll read it online later. Do you guys need me yet?”

“Nah, Caitlin said she’d let you know when they’re done.” Barry lowers the paper long enough to send a sideways look at the bundle of cloth in Cisco’s hand. “Nice hoodie. You think Iris and I should start wearing couple’s shirts too? I’ll give you credit for starting the trend.”

“You,” Cisco tells him, sending him spinning with a strong push, “are not as funny as you think you are.” Barry shrugs as he twirls away in his chair, smirking as Cisco rolls his eyes.

“He's in the kitchen, doing something weird with the blender,” Barry tells him while scooting back over.

“Not that I was asking, but thank you.” Cisco makes to exit the cortex, but thinks suddenly about that other Barry, and his stuttering explanations and apologies in the middle of B1 Cisco's shop, so perfectly familiar. “I told you I'd find you again,” was the first thing Barry said to him outside his doorway, and Cisco had no choice but to shake his head fondly and let him in.

“Barry,” Cisco calls back. Barry flips the newspaper down again to look questioningly at him, and Cisco's heart hiccups painfully at the thought of living through another lifetime without meeting him. “You know I love you, right? You're my best friend, and I dunno what my life would be like now without you. I'm glad we met.”

If Cisco was worried it sounded too suddenly sentimental, he shouldn't have been. Barry brightens, his amicable smile even more luminescent than usual. “Same here, Cisco. You're my best friend too, well, besides Iris, but you know what I mean. ‘I have been and always shall be your friend’, right?” He even extends his hand in the Vulcan salute, which Cisco mimics.

“Right, exactly.” From the medbay, Caitlin and Wally are watching them in puzzled amusement, so Cisco turns his salute into a point, directing it at them. “You guys too: I love you, okay? And your girlfriends, and your dad,” jabbing his finger at Wally, “and anybody else I missed. I love everyone in this lab.”

“You're cute, Cisco, but you're causing a ruckus. Get out,” Caitlin says, but she makes a little heart with her hands when he pouts at her.

He leaves them to their devices and wanders over to the kitchen in search of Harry. As Cisco might have expected from Barry's report, he finds Harry blending some sort of purplish concoction at the kitchen counter. Sitting by the wall is a glass vase full of flowers, some starting to droop, but a lovely arrangement nonetheless.

Cisco slides up onto a stool and tugs on one curling yellow petal, soft and silken between his fingers. “Since when were these in here?”

“Friday,” Harry says, still busy chopping up cashews.

“I must've missed them somehow.” Cisco plucks a withered leaf off a stem, wondering why he didn't see them when he was making lemonade on Saturday. He doesn't recognize the vase, so whoever bought the flowers must have brought it in as well. “Who are they- wait, did you say Friday?”

“I did,” Harry says mildly, tossing the cashews into the blender and starting the machine up again. Cisco glances between him and the flowers as the gnashing sound of grinding continues in the background.

“You bought these,” he says carefully, considering the events of the last few days. “For me? But you said you weren't the romantic type.”

Harry unplugs the blender and pours some of his purple glop in a cup. “No, I said Elizabeth was never the romantic type. Not that I am either, but I can make an effort.” He pauses in the middle of swirling the mixture to examine the vase himself, frowning when a petal falls free. “I should go to the florist’s again. These are wilting faster than I expected.”

“What? No, these are fine.” Cisco takes a hold of the vase and pulls it close to examine his flowers. They're bright and summery, and the idea of Harry lurking around a flower shop brings a smile to his face. “Flowers, huh. Were you going to put out candles too? Get some mood lighting going?”

“I would’ve sprinkled rose petals too, if you hadn’t scoffed at the idea.”

“Sorry, I didn’t realize how old-school you were. Feel free to shower me with roses and candles this Friday.”

“And run the risk of lighting you on fire? I'll just go back to the florist’s.”

Apparently satisfied with his gross drink, Harry pours the rest into a large jug and puts the blender in the sink alongside the other unwashed utensils. Cisco only remembers he came here for a reason when he sees Harry storing the smoothie in the fridge and preparing to wash his dishes.

“Before you start those, I wanted to give this back to you,” he says, tossing the hoodie over.

Harry catches it one-handed, before sending a dry look toward Cisco. “Not cold anymore? Or did you remember how to adjust the thermostat?” Cisco shakes his head, not really caring that he's been caught in his lie.

“Neither. Um. I think we should have a talk.” He gestures stiffly at another stool and Harry obliges, albeit with a slightly apprehensive look.

“Doesn’t this conversation usually come a little later on in the relationship?” Harry asks with a raised eyebrow, leaning against the edge of the counter. And okay, they’re referring to this thing-that’s-almost-a-thing as a relationship now, which is unexpected progress.

Cisco musses up his own hair in a small fit of nervous energy, unsure of how to start this conversation. “It’s not that kind of talk, but when have we done anything the right way around anyway?” He wants to buy more time, but there's nothing to wait on except his own courage, so he gives in and cuts to the chase. “I borrowed your shirt yesterday so I could vibe it, which sounds creepy and invasive, I know, but I wasn't trying to vibe you. I was trying to remember something from the B1 timeline, and that's the sweatshirt you were wearing when we met again, so I swiped it to anchor myself. Sorry about that.”

He knows Harry had been twitchy in the past about having Cisco read him, but apparently that was just when he was being sketchy and full of ulterior motives, because now he just

shrugs. "I don't mind, but you could have asked me if you needed help. Do you want to vibe directly off me?"

"No thanks, I think I saw what I needed. I knew I'd forgotten something, but I didn't know what it was until last night." Cisco pauses to gather his thoughts, all those lost memories from Earth-2 still clear in his mind. "I remembered our talk. Our fight? On Earth-2, before everything changed back. I was pretty harsh on you." He stops there, waiting to see if Harry still remembers. He doesn't know if it's a sore subject or not, even though it's been over a year.

Harry sits up straighter, and adjusts his glasses, his expression no more distraught than it was when he was using the blender, but a little bit contemplative. "You didn't say anything I didn't deserve. With the way we had left things between us, it was something you needed to say, and something I needed to hear. You were right, you know," he says, continuing after a short laugh at Cisco's confusion. "I'm happier here than I've been on my Earth in years."

Cisco lets out a long breath, sorting his thoughts on it all. So no sore feelings about his outburst, which is nice, since he wasn't sure he could apologize for it anyway. He could have been more tactful, but Harry's right: he needed to get everything his B1 self said off his chest.

"Okay. So. You came back because you wanted to, right, not because I guilt-tripped you into it?"

Harry makes an affirmative noise. "I stayed for my own sake; I wanted to help Barry and the team, and I wanted to be the person you all think I can be. But I came back in the first place for you," he says, and that causes a rush of some sort of emotion Cisco can't pinpoint.

"Just because I asked you to?" He sounds too incredulous, he knows, but he can't help it.

"Also because I needed to know if you were safe," Harry says matter-of-factly, like it's as simple as that. Maybe it is. "Did you try to vibe because you were afraid you'd, what, pressured me into sticking around?"

He might as well explain, since he still doesn't really have the answers he was looking for. "No, it's- sometimes I notice you looking at me, like there's something you're searching for. Something you're worried about. I know it only started after you returned, so I figured I must've forgotten the part of my B1 life that would explain it. I just didn't expect to have forgotten so much. Or that it had been so, uh, emotional."

"And did you figure it out?" Harry asks, observing him closely. "Do you understand now?"

"I wish I could say I did, but..." Cisco gives a defeated shrug.

Looking half-amused and half-serious, Harry turns so he can lean against the counter. From their location here, they can hear faint noises from the cortex: Wally and Barry shouting something in excitement, from what Cisco can make out. The kitchen, in comparison, is quiet and still, seemingly motionless except for a golden petal falling free from the bouquet. But these days, Cisco can feel much more movement in everything, and despite his appearance, there's a slight stirring around Harry's already distinct frequency.

“It's really not that complex. I look worried because I *am* worried. After Elizabeth, after Jesse was taken...call me a pessimist, but I like to keep a close eye on the people I'm concerned about. I was careless once, and look what happened.”

It makes sense that Harry must have become intensely more protective after his wife's death, but that doesn't explain why this expression is only ever reserved for Cisco, since everyone else in the team gets caught up in the same danger. “I mean, okay, it's not *completely* out of the question that I could be kidnapped again, but I've got a few tricks up my sleeve now,” Cisco says, floating the loose petals on the tabletop away with a gentle pulse.

But Harry shakes his head. “It's not just that. I worry about you because you don't worry enough about yourself. Near-death experiences and kidnappings, all the memories of your previous lives and deaths: you carry it all without complaining.”

Cisco winces because it's true. It's not like he wants to bottle it all up inside, but there's always something else to deal with, and his problems wind up forgotten and shoved to the side until they become too much to ignore. “I'm trying to work on that. But I know I've got you looking out for me, and I can always talk to Joe and Iris. You don't have to worry about me too much,” he says, aiming to be reassuring, but Harry shakes his head yet again.

“After everything you've been through, I'm not so sure.” He removes his glasses, laying them flat on the counter; without them in the way, Cisco can see the undercurrent of disquiet in his eyes. Harry continues, after taking a moment to choose his words.

“I watched you die from across another universe, and there was nothing I could do. And then I tore through the fabric of reality to find you angry and exhausted and alone, only to have you fade from existence right before my eyes, with no way of knowing if I would ever see you alive again.

“So when you opened a breach, of course I had to come back. And here you were, alive. Vivacious. Just like before, was my first thought, but that wasn't true. You had a whole new lifetime's worth of troubles that you didn't feel were worth talking about. A whole other self that it seems like only I remember, and sometimes I'm amazed you can be as spirited as you are, considering everything. Maybe you're strong enough to carry it all alone – I think you're more resilient than even you realize – but I don't want to find out too late that there was something more I could have done for you.

“I know you still have some hang-ups about being abandoned, but I'm afraid you're the one who's going to leave us behind. Some days I'm scared it's only a matter of time until you slip away again, and I can't lose you for a third time.” He releases a sharp exhale of breath that feathers into a shaky laugh at the end. “Do you get it now?”

Their eyes meet again, and this time, Cisco thinks he understands. Despite what Harry said, it's more than simple concern. More than electricity and magnetism, more than the interest of a worried friend.

Harry doesn't look at Cisco like he hung the moon – he looks at Cisco the same way he looks at the stars: despite how well he understands them he can't turn away, because they're still captivating after all this time. He looks at Cisco with both the fondness of familiarity, and a

kind of wondrous fascination, but also a subtle dread that the distance between them might be too great to overcome. After watching Cisco disappear right in front of his eyes twice now, it's all been overshadowed by the fear that it will happen again; another supernova, another casualty of circumstance out of Harry's control.

But he can handle this, Cisco realizes. He'd been afraid that whatever was plaguing Harry would be something he couldn't overcome, but it's not. Cisco is done being the universe's plaything; he's done with dying. He's had a bad run of luck prior to now, but he's not going to stand around and let something as trivial as causality and the time-space continuum fuck him over again. He has his powers under control now, and he's damn well going to be sure to protect himself and the people he cares about.

"Yeah, I think I get it," he finally says, scooting off his stool to move in front of Harry, who furrows his brow and tries to stand as well. "No, it's okay," Cisco says, pressing him back down with a hand to his shoulder. "I've said it before, but I'll tell you again. I'm not going anywhere. I've died enough already, and I'm honestly a little sick of it now. So don't worry so much, okay? I'm not going to let it happen again."

Harry sighs, rubbing at his temples. "You know it's not that easy. I can't just turn it on and off like a switch."

"Nothing about you is easy, Harry," Cisco says with a grin. "Just try your best. Trust me, I'll be alright."

"The problem is that you're too busy looking after everyone else to remember yourself," Harry grumbles.

"Then it's good that I've got you. We take care of each other." Harry has no response to that but to scrunch his mouth in tacit agreement, so Cisco leans up casually against the counter next to him, resting his weight on the table. "We good, then? Don't keep treating me like I'm going to vanish or shatter."

"Only if you promise to be honest about when you need help. Deal?" He holds his hand out for Cisco to take.

"Didn't you say I should get it in writing?" Harry rolls his eyes so Cisco huffs out a laugh and accepts his hand. "Fine, it's a deal."

But he lowers Harry's hand instead of shaking it. Slowly enough that Harry can withdraw if he wants, Cisco leans in and leaves a chaste kiss on his lips. When he moves away, he can see that Harry is perplexed, but beginning to catch on.

"What happened to waiting until after the first date?" he asks, smiling faintly, his hand still linked with Cisco's.

"That's only for PG-13 activity and up. We weren't making out."

"Maybe we should be." And he pulls Cisco back in for a second kiss. This one's a bit more involved, and it leaves Cisco slightly tipsy when they part. He looks at the space between

them, trying to size up whether this would be a practical location to try that again.

“Why weren't we doing this earlier?” he asks, dazed.

“You didn't want to emotionally scar the rest of the team, was my understanding,” Harry responds, looking awfully smug and Cisco's self-restraint wavers.

“I might need to rethink that decision,” he says as Harry's other hand comes to rest at Cisco's hip, steady and warm and all too tempting. It inches upwards until reaching the hem of his shirt, teasing there for a second before slipping up and under to brush lightly against his bare skin. Cisco shivers on contact, delighted by the way it causes Harry's pupils to dilate and his grip to tighten, and he decides right then and there. “Right, yup, I changed my mind,” he says all in a rush.

They wind up seconds later with Cisco pushing Harry into the counter's edge as they kiss, while trying not to tip over the stool as he attempts to climb onto Harry's lap. Their position isn't at all stable, and all the hard furniture corners make it pretty uncomfortable, but that doesn't much detract from how fucking awesome everything else is.

Of course, that's when Cisco's phone chimes with Caitlin's ringtone, loud and jingly and terrifying. It almost startles Cisco into tumbling to the ground, but Harry's hold around his waist keeps him upright. He doesn't let go even as Cisco fumbles around in his pocket for his phone, but he does hold out a hand to make a grabby motion.

“Give me that.”

“No, because I know you're gonna throw it in the blender, and I literally just got this phone back.” The phone continues ringing insistently.

Harry sighs, and makes a ‘go ahead’ gesture, looking exasperated. “Tell Snow her timing is impeccable, as always.”

Cisco grins and pecks him on the cheek, then untangles himself to speak to Caitlin. She summons them to the parking lot, since they'll be taking Wally out training again.

“Barry and Wally are going on ahead, so you and Harry better stop desecrating the kitchen and get out here if you don't want me to leave you behind.”

“We weren't- we were doing the nice wholesome task of making lemon meringue pie!”

“That's a new euphemism,” she laughs. “See you in a few.” She hangs up, leaving Cisco to scowl at his phone.

“Okay, so we're definitely going to have to make pie later or my cover story will fall apart,” he calls over to Harry, who's shrugging his hoodie on. “We better hustle or we're gonna have to walk there.”

They leave the kitchen, dawdling a little, and walking closely enough that Cisco only has to shift an inch or two to bump Harry.

“What?” Harry asks, putting his arm out to make sure Cisco isn’t going to faceplant on the ground.

“Nothing,” Cisco says automatically, but then he thinks he does have a question after all. “I need to know. Have you been...courting me?” Is that what’s been happening for the past year and a half?

But Harry’s brow wrinkles in confusion. “What do you mean?”

“Y’know, like, the coffee, the little gifts. And now the flowers. I dunno, I was just thinking about something Jesse said once.”

Harry scoffs, shaking his head. “If *that’s* what you consider courting I think your exes all owe you an apology. Those were just expressions of friendship. I’ve barely begun to court you. The flowers were only the beginning; I have much more in store for you.”

“You do? I can’t tell how I feel about this. On the one hand, it sounds kind of threatening? But on the other hand, it’s adorable. Are you *sure* you’re not a romantic?” Cisco teases.

“What do you think?” Harry asks dryly.

“I think you’re going to double down on being a pain in the ass to pretend you’re not, but I can see through you now. Caramel,” he accuses, and Harry snorts.

“We’ll see. Get a move on before Caitlin leaves us behind.”

They pick up the pace until they’ve almost reached the door, and Cisco realizes mournfully that they won’t have much time alone for the rest of the day.

He stops Harry in place. “Wait, give me a kiss for the road.”

“We’re going to be in the same car. Driving for ten miles, tops.”

“Yeah, but this is the last minute of peace and quiet we’ll have for a while. Please?” He waits patiently as Harry’s dubious expression finally softens.

“As you wish,” he says, leaning down. The kiss itself is short and simple, but Cisco’s brain barely registers it, caught up in Harry’s words.

“Did you just *Princess Bride* me?” Cisco asks after they separate, gaping at him.

Harry shrugs, pushing open the door and guiding him out. “You’re the one who started it. ‘I will always come for you’ – did you really think I wouldn’t remember what follows next?” Cisco groans; of course Harry caught on.

This is True Love. You think this happens every day?

“Well, I didn’t really expect you to have like memorized every line,” Cisco splutters, his face burning.

“That was your first mistake,” Harry says with a grin. “C’mon, they’re waiting on us.”

Cisco jogs to catch up to him, walking in step together the rest of the way, and he can’t help but smile. His powers are under control, his memories back where they belong, and he's hopelessly in love with someone who loves him back.

He's in the right timeline and things are great.

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